

Dr. K.B. KRISHNA

selected writings

VOLUME 5

Origin and Growth of Modern Democratic Ideas

Denis Diderot

Dr. K.B. KRISHNA

Birth Centenary Celebration Committee Publication

Dr. K.B.Krishna Selected Writings

Volume Five

Origin and Growth of Modern Democratic Ideas

Denis Diderot

BY

Dr. K. B. Krishna

M.A.,PH.D. (HARVARD)

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Birth Centenary Celebrations Committee Publication

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First Edition :

K.B. Krishna Birth Centenary Celebrations Committee, 2007

Title Design :

A. Giridhar

Printed at :

New C.P.C.,

Guntur - 522 002

Price : Rs. 100/-

\$. 20

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Acknowledgements

A Centenary Committee with renowned people from different walks of life in Andhra Pradesh was formed to commemorate the Birth Centenary of Dr. Katragadda Bala Krishna (1906-2006), a Marxist scholar 'par excellence' and one of the pioneers in the application of Marxist methodology to study the multifacets of Indian society. The editorial board intends to bring out the selected writings of Dr. Krishna in five volumes.

The publication of these volumes would not have been possible but for the most generous help extended by the 'kith and kin' of Dr. K.B.Krishna and a host of philanthropists and educationists whose debt can't ever be repaid. It is, therefore, pertinent to appreciate their gesture of goodwill individually.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to prof. K.S.R.K. Prasad, a retired professor from IIT, Mumbai, and Sri Katragadda Seshagiri Rao, Chennai, who have extended financial and moral support to the project.

We thank Sri Katragadda Brahmaiah, Proprietor of Sri Lakshmi Press, Guntur and Sri Katragadda Lakshmi Narasimha Rao, Chairman Katragadda Foundation, who evinced keen interest in the project and extended financial support to publish the first volume.

Sri Alapati Bapanna, Proprietor of Kala Jyothy Press, Hyderabad was kind enough to take the responsibility of publishing the second volume. We thank him profusely.

Sri Paruchuri Hanumanta Rao of Pragathi Art Printers, Hyderabad and Kavuri Kutumba Rao, one of the prominent participants of anti-zamindari movement in the erstwhile Challapalli Estate, most graciously accepted to publish the third volume. We thank them for their kind help.

We are grateful to Gaddipati Koteswara Rao, Former proprietor for of New C.P.C., Guntur for accepting to print the fourth and fifth volumes.

Our special thanks are due to the Staff of A.P State Archives, Hyderabad for their cooperation in putting together the manuscripts of Dr. K.B.Krishna as available in the Archives.

PREFACE

It is the earnest endeavour of the editorial board to classify the selected works of Dr. K.B.Krishna and bring them in five volumes.

Volume one : 1. Political and Social Thought of the Buddhist Writers. (1930) 2. Theories of Kingship in Ancient India (1932) 3. Studies in Hindu Materialism (1932).

Volume two : The Problem of Minorities, or The Communal Representation in India. (Ph.D. Dissertation - 1935 ; Published -1939)

Volume three : 1. Studies in Imperialism (1932), 2. Plan for Economic Development of India (1945) 3. Second World War and Industrialisation of India.

Volume four : Essays on Contemporary Political Issues.

Volume five : 1. Origin and Growth of Modern Democratic Ideas in 17th Century England. 2. Denis Diderot (French Materialist Philosopher)

The fifth volume includes two writings of Dr. K.B.Krishna. The first one is entitled ' Origin and Growth of Modern Democratic Ideas in 17th Century England [with Some Consideration of contemporary Events in the New World.] This was written by Krishna in 1931 when he was a student at Harvard University, USA. The second component of the volume is a monograph on Denis Diderot, the editor in-chief of French Encyclopaedia and an outstanding representative of philosophical materialism in 18th century. The common running thread of these two works of Dr. Krishna is the question of Enlightenment. The first essay of Krishna dealt with the political dimension of Enlightenment. The second one dwelt upon the Philosophical aspect of the same theme as was expressed by Denis Diderot. The second work was first of its kind ever written by an Indian during 1938-39. The Centenary Committee has taken immense pleasure in bringing out these works in printform for the first time.

Editorial Board

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Comments and suggestions are earnestly solicited for guidance in future editions. We take this opportunity to thank those who have supported indirectly or anonymously and extended their cooperation in this strenuous task of publishing the works of Dr. K.B.Krishna.

Centenary Committee would like to thank sri C. Radhakrishna Das, President, Social Sciences Trust for having gone through the final proofs meticulously.

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A Forgotten Intellectual of the South

Kambhampati Satyanarayana

Dr. K.B. Krishna (Katragadda Balakrishna), a brilliant scholar committed to social advancement, a valiant fighter against imperialism and a steadfast champion of the working class, died unknown, unhonoured and unwept in our country. The thirty-second death anniversary falls on December 22 this year¹.

His book, *The problem of Minorities, or Communal Representation in India*, was acclaimed by the UNESCO around 1950 as one of the two best works published till then on the question of minorities. His *Theories of Kingship in Ancient India* is based on primary sources like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, Manu Smriti, Aitareya Brahmana, Taittiriya Brahmana, Baudhyana Dharma Sutra, Vasishtha Samhita, Satapatha Brahmana, Sukra Neeti, Kalidasa's Raghuvamsa, Kautilya's Arthashastra, etc.,. His Political and Social Thought of the Buddhist Writers is based on ancient classics like Vajra Suchi, Sutralankara, Saundarananda Kavyam, Buddha Charita, Lalita Vistara, Aryasura's Jataka Mala, Buddha Ghosha's Parables, etc.

He studied Economics and Politics in Britain from 1921 to 1929. As a student and research scholar in the University of Harvard from 1929 to 1938, Dr. Krishna had free access to the translations of all the source materials mentioned above. He joined Harvard as student of Political Science, earning while learning. He delved deep into all the works pertaining to his subject, besides those on Economics, Sociology and Philosophy. He also studied Jurisprudence, Administrative Law, Comparative Public Law etc.

Krishna discovered that Marxism was the best tool for understanding the laws of social development. He strove to apply these laws to the rise and fall of empires, institutions and systems of society. It is in the light of this knowledge that he conducted researches on various subjects and produced valuable papers, such as those on Hindu materialism, Buddhist thought, Dravidian polity, Indian nationalism, India and the League of Nations, Factory Legislation in India, etc.

Krishna worked on the problem of minorities, or the Hindu-Muslim problem in India. Those essays, coupled with his further studies on Nationalism and Imperialism, developed into a thesis on communal

representation in India. It was submitted to Harvard University. "There is not one page in this book", says he, "which Rupert Emerson (his Professor K.S.) did not criticise. He is the most formidable critic of my work at Harvard, and I am very much indebted to him." But Emerson had to confront a veritable Titan. Krishna defended his thesis so brilliantly that the decision to award him the Ph D was unanimous. The hard-boiled imperialist, Emerson, had to bow his head.

Since then Krishna revised his thesis continuously, taking advantage of the additional material he could find at the India Office Library, London, the Colonial Office Library, the British Museum, the India League and other organisations. The book was finally published by George Allen and Unwin in January 1939. It is an outright indictment of the policy of divide and rule pursued by British imperialism in India.

A few days before the outbreak of World War II (September, 1939) Dr Krishna arrived in Madras and took part in the First Tamil Nadu Students Conference at Chidambaram. He was deeply involved in the student movement in the South. He addressed students gatherings, attacking British imperialism for thrusting the war on the Indian people. These speeches soon landed him in jail. Being accustomed to a comparatively free atmosphere, he was unaware of the ways of British imperialism in India. He was arrested in early 1941 and detained in the Vellor Central Jail under the Defence of India Rules.

This writer, together with about two hundred detenus brought from the four linguistic zones of Madras Presidency, had the opportunity of spending a year and a half with Dr. Krishna, exchanging ideas with him, listening to his talks and discussing problems with him. His outspokenness, earnestness and simplicity, coupled with his depth of vision, power of analysis and clarity of thought impressed all those who were close to him. In jail he adopted a novel method of teaching Capital, a method in which the teacher was also the taught. It was simple, the more intelligent among the students were divided into small groups of three each. Each group read together a particular section in a chapter; helping one another to understand the author's argument. Next, they sat with the teacher (Krishna) to seek his help to get difficult concepts clarified. Next, the group elected one among themselves to give an exposition of the section to the class as a whole. He fulfilled his task to the best of his capacity, the teacher sitting by his side. After he had completed the job, another member of the group answered questions, and a third supplemented or clarified one or two. This method meant training teachers from among the

students. Such classes were held once in two days, leaving one day for preparation.

When the Vellore detenu yard was busy in this process of teaching-cum-learning, Moscow Radio announced on June 21, 1941 that Hitler's forces had launched a massive attack on the Soviet Union along the 2000 mile border, violating the non-aggressive pact signed by the two powers. It was also announced that Britain, USA, China and the Soviet Union had entered into a treaty of friendship and mutual help for defeating the three Fascist powers (Germany, Italy and Japan). The announcement was a jolt to the detenus; till then their attitude to the war had been one of opposition, its character being imperialist. After Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union and the Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Help did it continue to be the same? What would be the future of the world, including colonies and semi colonies like India to fight side by side with the Allies without being hampered by British imperialism? What was the guarantee that colonies and semi-colonies would be liberated after the Allies won the war? Some saw a fundamental change in the situation. To many there was no change, as far as India was concerned.

At this juncture Krishna announced a temporary suspension of classes. He began to think hard, and after a week he drafted a thesis which ran into 300 pages of an exercise note-book. Some other prepared separate papers, presenting different points of view. After ten days the whole yard reassembled to discuss the draft.

In his draft thesis, Krishna showed how a qualitative change had occurred in the international situation. World imperialism had got spilt into two, one part joining the camp of democracy and socialism and the other assuming the most monstrous form, namely Fascism. The war no longer remained an imperialist war, it had become an anti-Fascist war. The interests of the working class lay in defeating Fascism and winning the world for democracy and socialism. The vanguard of the working class in India should work out a strategy consistent with the tasks of the working class as a whole - namely, the defeat of Fascism. He avoided all jargon, confining himself to the formulation of tasks in general. For a scholar cut off from Indian public life for about two decades it was a remarkable exercise in the application of the laws of dialectics to the changed international situation. To have prepared a thesis in barely ten days was quite a feat.

But the overwhelming majority of the detenus did not accept his thesis. Discussions went on for weeks. There was much intolerance and

rancour. This state of affairs disturbed the sensitive Krishna who felt isolated, though a strong group of tested revolutionaries supported his stand. By the time the official CPI line reached the yard he had been transferred to another jail.

Dr. Krishna was released at a time when the Fascist offensive was at its height. But lack of elementary means of sustenance, frustration in marital life and alienation from the patterns of work in India drove him to search for a suitable job. He worked as a Professor in Belgaum University for some time, but resigned due to differences with the authorities. He went to Sri Lanka to join as Professor in Colombo University, but was denied the post because of official interference. He worked for the All-India Manufacturers' Association on a research project, the subject being "Industrialisation in India during the Second World War". But his work was returned because it was found to be "too polemical".

The only friend Krishna had in Madras was the late Darsi Chenchiah, one of the Ghadar heroes who was imprisoned for about six years in Indian jails after the First World War. He and his wife, the late Subhadramma, treated Dr. Krishna with affection, shared food with him and tried to keep him in good spirits. But no one could help lift Dr. Krishna's drooping spirits. His disappointments grew. He dragged on for several weeks living on bare tea. He died on December 22, 1948.

Dr Krishna's work, *The Problem of Minorities, of Communal Representation in india*, was written on the basis of his doctoral thesis. Its theme runs like this (most of the wording is the author's). India is a colony of British imperialism. Hindus and Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, all alike, are denied civil liberties. They are slaves in their own land. The term 'minority' is invented to further the interests of British imperialism and certain sections of the backward professional classes. It is an indispensable expedient of counterpoise of natives against natives. A minority must not be disloyal, seditious, etc. It must be moderate, nay reactionary. It crawls on its belly for 'protection'. It cries for artificial ropes and pulleys for buttressing itself. It means a rising professional class belonging to one of the various faiths or communities that demands a share in the government. The alleged grievances of a minority against the majority are myths. But they are adopted by a class that needs such myths. The friction between Hindus and Muslims and between caste Hindus and the Depressed Classes is to be explained by the socio-economic formation of the country, not by religion. Hence, communal representation in legislative bodies has to be abolished. The history of communal representation,

is a veiled plea for posts and emoluments. The only solution is to demand independence for India. The demand for abolition of communal representation is inseparable from the demand for independence. But independence is not a gift. It has to be fought for by building up a united national front against British imperialism.

To buttress his argument, the author quotes extensively from statements of British Viceroy and Secretaries of State, the leaders of backward religions and communities - and also anti-imperialist sections like the Congress and the Communist Party of India. About the Communists he says: "The Communists are today the foremost workers for the united national front against imperialism. They do not isolate themselves from the national anti-imperialist struggle. They are transforming the growing unity already achieved by the Congress into a united national front against imperialism.

Social and Political Thought of the Buddhist Writers is a work of Dr. Krishna, posthumously published by the Visalandhra Publishing House, Vijayawada. Quoting from Buddhist writings, the author concludes that Buddhism has trimmed and tempered the conception of monarchy with its humanitarian ideals. It has purged it of divinity, set aside the baneful influence of priests and sought the origin of authority in the people. It made kingship an office and relegated sacrifices to the background. It exalted the conception of equality, and on that ground attacked the caste system. *Theories of Kingship in Ancient India* is also a work posthumously published by Visalandhra. Quoting from several classics, the author concludes that the divine right of kings never existed in India in its extreme form. All that Hindu theory emphasised was the divine origin of the institution. It did not logically deduce the implication as was done in the West.

Political Thought in Dravidian Literature is an unpublished work of Dr. Krishna, preserved in the AP State Archives, Hyderabad, on a loan basis, along with other papers of his. It is a compilation of extracts from Tamil classics of the early Christian era and Telugu, Kanarese and Malayalam works of the early medieval period. Most of the pages are devoted to Tamil classics. Thiruvalluvar's *Kural* is a combined treatise on politics, economics and ethics. Its author addresses himself to the whole community of mankind, without regard to caste, class or faith. There is no mention of the divine right of kings, ministers, ambassadors and spies are mentioned in detail. Another classic, *Silappadikaram* by Ilango, advocates limited monarchy with five assemblies, a high priest and ministers. The rulers held before them high ideals. The notion of toleration had a high

place. Society is depicted as a combination of five different professions. Another work, *Manimekhalai*, gives an idealised picture of a Buddhist monarch. Caste is repudiated, and the doctrine of quality supported. Other works like *Chintamani* and the hymns of Saivite saints are also dealt with. Regarding Telugu works, political thought as propounded in *Amuktamalyada* of Krishna Deva Raya, *Neetisara* by Prataparudra, *Mitakshara* by Yagnavalkya, *Neetisara Muktaavali* by Baddena, *Paratatva Rasayana* by Phanibhatta, etc., are briefly dealt with.

Studies in Hindu (Indian) Materialism is another unpublished manuscript of Dr Krishna, preserved in the AP State Archives. The author here traces the history of materialist thought in India, beginning from Brihaspati and Charvaka and ending with Vemana. Source material for his study of Brihaspati and Charvaka (B.C. 1200-200) is divided into eight categories. The first includes texts which refer to Lokayata indirectly - Rigveda, Aitareya Brahmana, Aitareya Aranyaka, Taittiriya Brahmana, Yaska Nirukta, Upanishads, Puranas, Mahabharata, Ramayana and Manu Smriti. The second category includes Buddhist texts - Buddhist Suttas, Dhammapada, Sutta Nipata, Sanyutta Nikaya, Angutta Nikaya, Malinda Panho, Saddamma Lankavatara Sutta, Abidamatta Samga, Kada Vattu, Patimokka, Magavagga, Cullavagga, etc.,. Under the third category come jaina texts like Nandi Sutra, Anuyogadvarani Sutra, Jaina Sutras, etc.,. The fourth includes texts of opposition writers, who referred to Lokayata indirectly - Anugita, Asvagosha, Bhasa, Bhaskaracharya's *Brahma Sutra*, the works of Harsha, Kautilya, Krishna Misra, Madhavacharya's *Sarva Darshana Sangraha*, Panini, Patanjali, Sankara, Vatsyayana, Vachapati Misra, etc. The fifth includes important articles, essays and works on Hindu materialism, numbering 16. The sixth includes other works, numbering 25, which refer to Hindu materialism casually. Miscellaneous works, numbering three, fall in the seventh category. The last includes nine journals of learned societies.

Explaining the primitive character of Lokayata, the author says it does not explain the world as a concrete reality of substance and phenomena, but in terms of sensations; it emphasises perceptions as the only source of knowledge. It maintains that the four elements - earth, air, water and fire are self - existing principles; their permutations and combinations produce an infinite variety of bodies. But the system does not explain the elements. "It is curious how the Lokayatas who protested against the mechanical forms of inference as a source of knowledge, fell into the same mechanical forms of reasoning, when they explained that the four elements become transformed into organism (which includes the mind as well as the soul). " In denouncing religion as the invention of

individuals desirous of deceiving their fellowmen, the Lokayats did not go beyond the ideas that prevailed in their days. They denounced the Vedas as authority, but quoted passages from the Upanishads to support their views. They do not hold with the Buddha that evil is the essence of existence; they hold that life can be enjoyed though it is mingled with pain. "Like Buddhism", said the author, "which is new wine poured into old bottles, Lokayata is new wine poured into old bottles. It is the natural-born body of India. It is cast in the mould of the country, and partakes of the contradictory streams of life in India."

Dealing with Kapila's (B.C. 700-600) Sankhya system, the author says; "Kapila, in spite of some orthodox leanings, is a democrat. All men alike have the power of effecting their emancipation, irrespective of caste... He, like Descartes, refused to accept the authority of anything which had preceded him. He would accept only what his reason or conviction would accept... The leading principle of Kapila's system is that blessedness of soul cannot be attained by religious rites but by knowledge."

The five post-Upanishadic materialists (B.C. 1000-600) Ajita Kesa Kamblin, Pakutta Kachayana, Sanjaya Belatha Putta, Purana Kassapa and Makkali Gosal - are not, according to the author, direct materialists like the Lokayats. Yet they denounced ritual, life after death and the concept of soul as an active element in life. Sanjaya Belatha Putta, according to the author, is the father of Indian dialectics. Makkali Gosal conceived of the world as a rational, purposive order, "a system in which everything has that place and function as assigned to it which contributes to the well-being of the whole".

Dr Krishna discovers "materialist aspects" even in the Bhagavad Gita. Krishna, the preceptor, says the author, emphasised knowledge coupled with action, and taught unity of theory and practice. He did not deny the role of will; yet he stated that will itself-determined by nature. Nature, according to him, is self-determined in each individual. Both man and nature are determined. Within this determinism man is yet free to act. Consciousness is an instrument of nature when it acts. By propounding this idea Krishna undermined fatalism. He attacked the Vedas mildly (They bring no message to this fleeting a illusory world) and speaks with contempt of the "flowery speech spoken by witless fools" who see nothing beyond the Veda. Nowhere in the Gita does Krishna speak of caste by birth. He speaks of caste formed according to nature. Each man possesses his own nature, whose promptings it is idle to defy.

Next, the author deals with the materialist aspects of *Prabhoda Chandrodaya*, an allegorical play of the 10th Century, written by Krishna

Misra. The actors are persons like Charvaka, Buddha, Jaina and others, and qualities like prudence, virtue, passion, etc. The play is devoted to defence of Advaita against other schools. The ideas that emerge from the dialogues, according to Dr. Krishna, compelled the orthodox systems to reconsider their opponents' views, and in some cases, they were incorporated by later Hinduism, as in the case of Buddhism and Jainism.

Lastly, Vemana (AD 1400), though not materialist, attacked the evils of his day purely from a utilitarian point of view. His protest is of the same nature as that of the Buddhists - temperate and dignified. He did not deny God or soul. All that he denied was the efficacy of worship, pilgrimages and sacrifices, of idolatry and other devices of the Brahmans. He denounced the caste system in a way none had done before. He was more of a social reformer.

India and the League of Nations is an extensive study of India's role in the League of Nations, whose activities comprised economic development of member countries, regulation of labour conditions, disarmament, codification of International Law, preservation of peace, child welfare activities, etc. Though India had a Legislative Assembly and a Council of State, delegates to the League of Nations were chosen not by the Legislature but by the Executive. India's role was a subservient one. The author shows that in crucial matters like reduction of armaments, constitution of the army and economic development, Indian delegates were no better than Britain's puppets. Regarding the princely states, the Paramount Power played the role of ringmaster. The controversies which raged in the Central Legislature regarding the representative character of Indian delegations are dealt with to pin-point the opposition of the elected members to the autocratic policy of Britain. A silverlining, however, was the performance of Labour delegates in the ILO. (The reference, obviously, is to V.V. Giri, N.M. Joshi and S.V. Parulekar).

The Theory of Redistribution of Provinces in India. Its Origins and History. The scope of this paper is limited. It is concerned with the theory or redistribution of provinces. It does not deal with the movement as such, though some of its characteristics are mentioned. After a study of papers concerning the Bengal Partition (1903-1906), those concerning Bengal and Assam (1903-1906), the Montagu-Chelmsford Report (1918), the resolutions of conferences convened by representatives of the English-educated middle classes and others of various historical communities (Andhras, Tamils, Kanarese, Oriyas), the Reports of the All-parties' Conference (1928), the Statutory Commission (1929), the Second Round-Table Conference, the White Paper proposals, the Joint Commit-

tee Report and the New Constitution Bill for India, the author says that the origins of the theory lie in the growth of professional classes in the various backward historical communities. "The history of this movement is the history of the struggle between the professional classes of the historical communities and those of the provinces from which they wished to secede. On the part of the Government, it is a history of concessions and counterpoise."

The Second World War and Industrialisation in India is a product of intensive research done by Dr. Krishna after his release from jail. But it was rejected by the All-India Manufacturers' Association, which had entrusted the project to him. The theme of the paper runs like this: The State in India is an imperialist state, run in the interests of millocracy and moneyocracy of Britain. The chief problem of the young bourgeoisie is the market for selling its goods. It struggles for this market against the imperialist state. It is in this struggle that the nationalist movement was born. The history of industrial development in India is the history of concessions from imperialism. Between 1890 and 1920 industrial development was of limited character under the aegis of imperialism. The textile industry was the only large-scale industry run by the native bourgeoisie. But it earned immense profits during the First World War. There was further development during 1920-39, but that too was of a limited nature. Industries like cement, coal, cotton, piece-goods, jute, matches, paper, pig iron, sugar and steel ingots grew. There was a remarkable increase in production, especially in consumer goods industries. There was partial self-sufficiency in cotton, pig iron, steel, glass, paper, hardware and soap. There was intense political agitation and struggle for concessions.

But serious defects in the Indian economy came in the way of further progress. Firstly, feudal oppression in the countryside curbed the purchasing power of the masses. Secondly, there was better competition between big industrial houses like the Tatas and the Birlas and small manufacturers. Thirdly, industrial finance organisations had no control over banks, which were mostly in the hands of British financiers. Lastly, transport shipping and automobile industries were not encouraged by the state.

During the Second World War, export of manufacture goods gave a fillip to the growth of certain industries (textiles, machine-tools, engineering goods, scientific instruments, drugs, heavy chemicals, etc.) This was mostly due to war requirements. Big Indian industrialists earned record profits. Export controls, bureaucratic regulations, inefficiency and corruption acted as brakes on further growth. Also it was clear that the Govern-

ment would not encourage certain industries, shipbuilding, automobile, aviation, iron and steel, etc., "We are for industrialisation", says the author. "We mean by this that we demand conditions for the free development of capitalism. This means a struggle against feudalism and imperialism. When freedom is won, we believe that as long as there is scope for development within the framework of a freed capitalist system, the working class, the kisans, the students and middle classes, will support the regime because they can develop to a certain extent. When the productive system becomes a fetter to further development, the working class and its allies can take the matter into their hands, according to the degree of their consciousness, organisation and influence over the masses."

Dr. Krishna prepared several other papers, which include the following. Factory Legislation in India and its Effectiveness in Bombay Presidency; Studies in Imperialism, Revolutionary Upsurge in India; Indian States in a Federal Structure; Separation of Judicial and Executive Functions with reference to Indian Magistracy; French Revolution; The Three Russian Revolutions; the Problem of Nationalities in the USSR; The Three Internationals; Diderot; Origin and Growth of Democratic Ideas in 17th Century England; Bacon(notes); Studies in the History of Philosophy(notes)

The degree of richness and advancement of a community is often measured by the number of creative scholars it has. Unfortunately, in societies based on exploitation, this is not so. Creative intellect not in consonance with the existing system and not readily useful for the perpetuation of the system is beyond comprehension. Perhaps Dr Krishna is just an example of how the intellectual wealth of humanity is not only allowed to go waste, but also undergoes intense mental torture in its struggle to lay bare the truths of natural and social laws. When will humanity learn to harness its intellectual resources, the most valuable of all resources, to full advantage?

From : Mainstream, December 20, 1980 pp. 24-26.

EDITORS NOTES :

1. As per the available records, Dr. Krishna died on 18th December 1948. See, Andhra Patrika Daily dated 23rd December 1948.

Origin and Growth of Modern Democratic Ideas in 17th Century England

[with Some Consideration of contemporary Events in the New World.]

K.B.Krishna

May 1931

Origin and Growth of Modern Democratic Ideas in 17th Century England

[with Some Consideration of contemporary Events in the New World.]

"The Seventeenth Century was confronted by problems which were thought it had permanently solved, unexpectedly, they have in these latter days re-emerged; they are still, it seems, living issues ; they still stir the blood of those who mingle in public affairs"

J.A.R. Marriot.

"The Crisis of English Liberty"

1930 preface

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Origin and Growth of Modern Democratic Ideas in 17th Century England

[with Some Consideration of contemporary Events in the New World.]

I

Introduction

Political philosophy in the 17th century is for the most part English where it is important. The continent had no names to set alongside those of Hobbes and Locke. In Althusius, indeed, the impact of Dutch achievement and experience gave birth to theories of ample profundity. But there is little evidence to show that it deeply or widely affected the minds of men. The 17th century belonged mainly to the English because the prevalence of ruinous civil war upon the Continent hardly left men space to do more than sigh for peace and the relief at its coming was everywhere so great that, with rare exceptions, even an autocracy like that of Louis XIV was acceptable because it brought with it the cessation of conflict. But in England, until the last ten years of the century, foreign war was an incident which hardly affected the substance of her national life. The matter of internal conflict was such that the debate was bound to centre about the fundamental problems of life and politics. Such a century, is bound to be a great smithy whence political ideas are forged for the good of mankind.

In a background of this type, we have to trace the origin and growth of modern democratic ideas. Before we proceed further we have to be clear about the phrase, 'the origin and growth of modern democratic ideas'.

In the first place, I do not think that the 17th century alone gave birth to any special democratic ideas. The ideas that we find battling for supremacy between the Crown and Parliament, have a hoary ancestry. They could be traced to the beginnings of the Ancient and Mediaeval worlds. As Gurke puts it in Maitland's translation, the mediaeval world, nursed in its bosom, antique - modern ideas. Let me illustrate this in the case of England. Wycliffe, the father of English democratic tradition, Lollardism, Edwardian legislation, the premature Lancastrian constitution, the Reformation, the birth of Independency and Republicanism - all these are the ancestors of English democratic tradition of the 17th century. As such, it is inappropriate to speak of the origin of democratic ideas in 17th century England alone.

The second point we have to be clear is about "democratic ideas" what do we mean by 'democratic'. The persistence of the usage of this word is as ancient as Aristotle. Thucydides, Polybius, Cicero, Bodin all follow the nomenclature and traditional terminology of the old writers in spite of the fact, that form and content have changed by 17th century. We shall cling to the old terminology. In Maitland's phrase, the forms are dead but they rule from the grave.

Does "democratic ideas" mean ideas affecting people, or ideas originated by the people? In the latter sense, it is shetching the meaning too far. All ideas can be originated by the people aristocratic, democratic or monarchic. In the former sense, there is a possibility that ideas relate to 'people'. Although modern writers like Dewey, Lippman Lebon and all sociologists feel sceptical about the word 'public', still let us assume that there is such a rational entity as 'people'. If this reasoning is correct, then 'democratic' means just a form of government relating to the people. The content may be expressed by aristocratic or monarchic or dictatorial elements. In this sense 'democratic ideas' mean ideas relating to a government in which the preponderant share of power resides in the people.

It may also mean ideas relating to a society based on principles of political and religious freedom. Democratic ideas can also be viewed through another angle. Whatever the form of government, the end of ideas is democratic welfare. In this sense, fascism, communism and kemalism all can be called democratic ideas because they relate to the welfare of people. The English constitution is said to be today democratic although it contains all the traditional aristocratic, monarchic and democratic elements. The form belies but the content justifies the word 'democratic'. The 17th century ideas are of this conflicting type. Judged by 'form' alone some ideas are 'democratic'. Judged by 'content' alone some ideas are 'democratic'. The 17th century is one huge cauldron of conflicting and competing 'democratic ideas'. The patterns are interstitial. They are from molar to molecular action. I will try to illustrate the bewildering array of these ideas in the next section.

We have yet to consider the word 'idea' before we can proceed to discuss the subject proper. I think the word 'idea' is appropriate because political ideas are not quite coherent in the 17th century. They are opportunistic. They are essentially the products of circumstances. They are not an organic unity. They are to be understood in opposition to a 'theory'. The 17th century has no political theories but political ideas. It is essentially a century of disorganization and critical transition. It is essentially a laboratory where all ideas flowed and changed qualitatively into creative ideas. It is essentially, if I could transpose Mehring's phrase, an age of political chemistry and therefore an age of creative ideas. They are creative not because they are acts of omnipotence but because they are acts, used and utilised and brought to bear upon by ideas from outside their range.

Moreover these ideas have not grown in the 17th century. They have already grown by the 16th century and Elizabeth's reign is an example of such growth. The 17th century witnessed a clash of ideas with

an overgrown system of Tudor pattern. It saw an integration and disintegration. It staged a Hegelian dialectics. It set the current of thought to the mould of 1688.

I have diagnosed the phrase 'the origin and growth of democratic ideas' at such a length because, in such a diagnosis lies the substance history and definition of democratic ideas. As I said before, any judicious judgment must be interstitial. The soul of the primitive world is in its appeal to what Aristotle calls 'peace and ordering'. The soul of the middle ages lies in its appeal to authority, of reformation in the spoken word of God, of the 17th century in Reason, the reason of Grotius, prufendorf, of Stoics and Cicero. In such a background, the democratic ideas can be classified into the following types. If I can put them into the type of German compounds, they are.

1. Democratic monarchic ideas
2. Democratic communist ideas
3. Democratic republican ideas
4. Democratic religious ideas
5. Democratic legal ideas.

This classification does not purport to be final nor scientific. All classifications are arbitrary if not for the immediacy of purpose and end. I do not think it is advisable to treat, in ex tenso, in the old fashioned way, the political classics and treat the ideas in a chronological order. Political thought does not lie in books and writers. It finds expression in the age. It is a continual stream fed by the libations of devout thinkers. If political ideas are to be understood in any thoroughness, they must be studied in terms of relativity, in terms of what Kohler calls civilisation. The true maker of political ideas is Society and not classics and writers. Hence I am not discussing what Coke, Eliot, Selden say, nor what Lalburne, Ireton, Milton, Harrington wrote; nor what Winstanley preached, nor what Presbyterians and Independents growled. In other words, the true smithies of demo-

cratic ideas are the Parliament, Common Law and its oracle Coke, Judges, Army and Church. Through these investices evolve modern democratic ideas of the 17th century, not full pledged as I said before, but reoriented and creative.

II

DEMOCRATIC IDEAS

A. Parliament, Lawyers, Common Law and Judges

In one sense Parliament, common law judges and Monarchy could be dealt under one heading. They all clash together. They all produced one set of ideas. They all emphasised 'limitation'. Let us take Parliament first. A glance at Gandiner's constitutional documents suffices to show the great output of democratic ideas. The petition of Rights, the Root and Branch petition, the Grand Remonstrance, the 19 propositions, all these clearly state the democratic basis of their stand. Their claims were novel, more novel than those of the king. They wanted a transference of sovereignty to themselves.

'The Rule of Law' is the main contribution of the lawyers to the democratic theory of the 17th Century. The Law is above the king. He possessed no power other than that sanctioned by Law. The chief exponent of this is Sir Edward Coke. While law is above the king, the duty of interpretation lies with the Parliament. To them law is Religion. To Coke common law was the supreme sovereign. It was common law that asserted the relational concept of feudalism. It was common law that revived the concept of rights and duties. It taught that, if the king has rights, he has duties as well. It limited the absolutism of the Stuarts. It was identified with the law of Nature. It was by common Law again, Coke said and maintained that the liberties and privileges of the House of Commons were derived not from the king. It was again by common law that

the powers of the High Commission were limited. The perinatal feather was plucked from the High Commission and nothing but the stump remained. And he who plucked the feather was Coke. In Coke's time the judges not infrequently acted as legal advisers to the crown. Again it was common law that laid the foundations of judicial independence. Coke showed that prohibitions had always been issued by the Common law courts whenever any other court exceeded its jurisdiction. It was again the judges, who decided that the king could not by his proclamation make anything an offence which was not an offence before. The famous Peacham's case decided that judges ought not to deliver their opinions beforehand in any criminal case that may come before them judicially. No wonder that Coke was called the oracle of Law. It was he who said that "Law is the safest shield."

Summing up, the chief democratic ideas of the Parliament, Lawyers, Common Law and the Judges are.

1. The Sovereignty of Parliament
2. The Supremacy and Rule of Law
3. The Independence of Judges.

all of which aim at the limitation of the Monarchy¹

B. Army

Let us take the army. The political history of the army, as Gooch puts it, begins in 1647. The democratic ideas are centred in what are mistakenly called levellers. They are nothing more than radicals. Their chief idea is equal justice to all. If Charles spoke of the sovereignty of the king, if Pym spoke of the sovereignty of Parliament, if Coke spoke of the sovereignty of law, the levellers spoke of the sovereignty of the common people. They were the early Chartists demanding manhood suffrage, equal electoral divisions and biennial Parliaments. Their Magna Charta is the

"Agreement of the People". It was the protective legend of the age. The rest of the English History is a commentary on this. Like Magna Charta. This document played a dominant part in the political debate of this century. The agreement of the people not to the 'Heads of proposals'. Lilberne was their leader. It was he who proclaimed that

"England is a nation governed, bounded, and limited by laws and liberties."

Next to Lilberne there was Lockyer, the army's martyr. He craved for the immediate establishment of liberty and democratic order. Acton was another. He emphasised the same ideas. He voiced the discontent of the army. Cromwell was another. His contribution to democratic ideas is exaggerated. Even the Clarke Papers do not throw any light on this problem. All that I can say of him is, with Gooch, that :

"his desire was to govern justly, moderately and constitutionally, and it was the fault of circumstance that he was forced to rule as an autocrat".²

Summing up the chief democratic ideas of the Army are

1. The sovereignty of the people
2. The appeal to the law of nature of Cicero and Stoics.
3. Equality of all before law.
4. The doctrine of inherent natural rights.

C. Democratic Republican Ideas

We now come to the consideration of democratic republican ideas. Millton, like Locke, was the champion of Liberty. His *Aeropagitica* was a plea for freedom. The birthright of an individual was freedom, not power. The true commonwealth is one without a single person on a House of Lords. He is opposed to the personal government of any type. He is a Republican monarchomach.

When we come to Harrington, we find a different note. He was the first, to recognise, like Boden, the influence of economics on politics. He was the precursor of current Marxian dogma. He was the first to introduce the ballot system. He thought that distribution of power must, in the long run, correspond to the distribution of property. He believed in the principle of rotation. His government was a senate proposing, the people resolving, the magistracy executing. His essence of commonwealth was equality. His politician must be a traveller and a historian. The chief ideas are.

1. Aristocratic republicanism
2. Freedom of speech
3. Equality
4. Equal distribution of property
5. Government by rotation of ballot.

D. Democratic Communist Ideas

We now come to the democratic communist ideas. The precursors of Winstanley go back to the middle Ages. 'When Adam delved and Eve span who was then the gentleman ?' What is rank but a guinea's (pig's) stamp?". These are some of their slogans. Wintanley realised the importance of education and the study of natural science. He has that sense of the possibility of changing human nature. His little band of diggers on St. Georgis Hill are important in the history of thought rather than of action.

E. Democratic Religious Ideas

Let us examine the democratic religious ideas. They can be summed up in Presbytirianism and Independency. Presbytirianism limited monarchy by their Rutherfords, Prynnes and Bauxites. Independency stood for republicanism. It is two fold, independency of church and of organisation. Rutherford exalted the power of the people at the expense of the king and Parliament. If reason is the measure of all things with Grotius, the law of

England is the measure of all things with Prynne. The spiritual fathers of Independency were Robert Brown and Barnow. As Gooch puts it, the first written contribution of modern democracy was the offspring of the Independents. They are defenders of toleration. Besides there, these were Baptists and Fifth Monarchymen. Power rested in the people. The priests and the lawyers are the two plagues of the nation. These were their chief ideas. Then there were Quakers. They did not contribute much to democratic theory. They manifested an intolerant contempt of authority. Summing up, the ideas of these religious sects are :

1. Popular sovereignty
2. Independency of church organisation
3. Limited Monarchy
4. Republicanism
5. Toleration

Toleration is one of the chief democratic ideas. It stands on a different footing from that of other ideas. The 16th and 17th centuries saw a great necessity of it. It was only realized in the latter half of 19th century.

All these ideas are essentially the product of circumstances. There was nothing speculative about these ideas. As Gardinen puts it, the leading ideas of the 17th century are two. One is that good and religious men have a right to rule the evil and the irreligious. The second is that the nation ought to be governed according to the wishes of its representatives in Parliament.³

III

NEW WORLD

Let us consider some contemporary events in the New world with special reference to Democratic Ideas. The colonists took with them, as Lord Acton puts it 'Consociation but not subordination'. They have a distrust of law and its knavish tricks. They were lovers of individual liberty and carried with them religious freedom. With them "the democratic church became the democratic state". The pilgrims, in their pact, speak of "a civill bodie politick" and the motives set forth are the Glory of God, the advancement of Christianity and the honor of the king. The Plymouth colonists carried Bible in their hands and interpreted it in the light of this unwritten tradition. The Massachusetts Bay colony was richer and more theocratic than Plymouth colony. It does not seem at all evident that the Plymouth was more "democratic" save that it did not link the franchise with church membership. In Massachusetts and Connecticut, the union of the state with the church was puritan in principle. The settlement of Connecticut was democratic in origin. It drifted away from the theocratic idea of the puritan type. The colony of variginia had many vicissitudes. It was democratic as long as the political conditions permitted. With the Restoration, it reasserted its ancient loyalty. Let us take Rhode Island. Here Roger Williams had developed a theory of toleration that was as far going as, at that time, was possible. In his "Bloucly, Tenet of Persecution for the cause of Conscience", he asserts the broad principle that religious freedom was the only really Christian way. And when driven from Massa-

chusetts in 1636, he founded the town of Providence on a basis of religious freedom.

To two children of the dissenting type of Protestantism belongs then, the credit of developing a doctrine of Religious toleration. These two are the Baptists and Quakers. They represent pronounced types of conventicle Protestantism. For both, the Bible is the sole authority. Both recognise the autonomy of the individual group of worshippers and in both there is historic priestly ministry. Massachusetts passed stringent laws against Quakers. After many attempts, the impact of Dutch achievements showed the way for true toleration to the colonists. Till at last religious indifference paved the way in the colonies for complete toleration. The chief contribution of these religious dissenters was they were able to carry in America into practice what in England were abstract opinions. The effect upon the New world is two fold :-

1. It led to the founding of colonies with all their experiments in church and state government.
2. It made toleration inevitable and possible ⁴.

IV

CONCLUSION

The 17th century is essentially an age of religion and politics. It has the puritan stamp of quality of thought. It is an age of 'consociation' as well an age of subordination. It recognised obedience as well as 'ruling' and authority. It was also an age of morals where law, policies and jurisprudence drew their chief inspiration. They have a different effect on the new world. The distrust of law, authority and magisterial power, the religious freedom and individualism, the desire for the elevation of the soul, coupled with the needs of a fortune - pioneer society, worked havoc in politics and law. Even today the effects still linger in this country.

References and Notes :

1. I have not dealt in detail about Eliot, Selden who also aim at limited monarchy. About Pym and Hampden also I have not dealt. I just mentioned their acts in the Parliament. I have already dealt in detail about these aspects in my last paper on Strafford.
2. G.P. Gooch : 'Political Thought in England. p. 96
3. S.R. Gardinir : History of Commonwealth and Protectorate" 1649-1660 Vol.I, p.32, 1897.
4. I have written this section as briefly as possible. I have put the main ideas however as best as I could. One can write a separate book on this topic alone.

DENIS DIDEROT

Dr. K.B. Krishna

"For Truth it is enough for it to be accepted by a few men, be they good much; Truth is not called upon to be pleasing to everyone"

"Since I am less inclined to instruct you than to train your mind, it matters little whether you adopt my ideas or reject them, provided they engage your whole attention. A man more skilled than I will teach you to understand the forces of nature; for me it is enough to have made test out your own strength."

Denis Diderot

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INTRODUCTION

Anyone who wishes to work out a stable view of the universe must pay attention to the latest victories of science, and also to its history. No one can fairly lay claim to a philosophy of life, or call himself the follower of a doctrine, if he is ignorant of the elements and the origin of that doctrine, and of the deep-seated social causes which gave rise to it and which justify it as an attitude to life.

Very often the first sketch of a theory of later date is to be found among thinkers of past ages; sometimes there are even precise statements of it, which are repeated, almost to the letter, generations afterwards. Very often these theorists of the past are found to have put into words the selfsame difficulties which in a later age will bring the philosophers who come after them to a standstill. Each new form of society adds something to the legacy left by earlier thinkers; nevertheless it remains true that they came first, and in the philosophic systems of today it is not difficult to recognise the elements of structures of the past.

Dialectic materialism has not made its appearance like some *deus ex machina*, any more than any other doctrine. It too has its ancestry. In the course of history, when certain economic conditions are realised, there come times when a materialist outlook ceases to be the privilege of the advanced few, and spreads till it becomes the prevailing view of the universe in a given society. Such, for example, is the seventeenth century; and judging from present-day tendency to materialism, such will undoubtedly be the twentieth century in the U.S.S.R.

Richer in content, more profound in structure, more complex in its consequences than any other philosophic doctrine, the dialectic materialism of Marx and Lenin makes it necessary to take note of the natural sciences in a way which is both accurate and genuine. At the same time, however, it makes it imperatively necessary to study the history of the materialist conception of the world.

Nevertheless, efforts to do so have been few. Bourgeois outlines and manuals of the history of philosophy are almost silent on the materialist systems. Only a few researchers seem to have taken an interest in the exponents of this philosophy. It is no exaggeration to say that the public is almost wholly ignorant of the materialism of the Renaissance, and knows hardly more about that of England. The French materialists of the eighteenth century have had a better chance; the labours of Plekhanov, though not without some blunders, have set goal the study of Holbach and Helvetius from the materialist point of view. But thinkers of so much interest as Robinet and Bonnet are still waiting for monographs to be written on them by materialist authors.

It is true that among the French philosophers of the age of enlightenment, the rich and vital personality of Diderot has often attracted historians; all the same, his doctrine of materialism has yet to be investigated. He is looked on primarily as the editor of the *Encyclopaedia*, the man of letters, writer, historian; he is never treated as a philosopher. Even when an interest has been taken in "Diderot the thinker" it is for the purpose either of attacking his materialist conception, or of disentangling and bringing clearly to view his quasi-idealist character.

But the judgments passed upon him in literature are sufficiently interesting to detain us for a moment. The whole nineteenth century is summed up in them; they reflect the dawn and the twilight of bourgeois society. In fact, in the course of the century, Diderot's friends and enemies follow one another. Superficially, it is a matter of personal preferences; but

set in the historical perspective of the Revolution, with its upheaval of ideologies no less than of life, they take on a class significance. In that way they become a testimony.

Diderot's contemporaries knew him for what he really was : a thinker first and foremost, a materialist of deep conviction, a militant atheist, a moralist who had broken once and for all with the ethics of religion, a critic of pseudo-classical art. Those who shared his ideas - and they were, broadly speaking, the Third Estate, permeated through and through with the spirit of Revolution, were among his friends. Those who sided with the old regime, in no matter which of its aspects, became by that very fact the implacable enemy of the Encyclopaedists and, in consequence, of Diderot. And if it were necessary to quote contemporary writers to represent the extremes of these two attitudes, the intransigent Naigeon could appropriately be named on the one hand and, on the other, the no less intransigent Jesuit Abbe Georgel.

The reaction which set in vigorously at the end of the nineteenth century made out the Encyclopaedists to be 'limbs of Satan', and, for a long time, a legend was evolved in which Diderot and his friends were represented as dangerous atheists, preachers of immorality, or, on the most favourable showing, worldly-wise praters. This was because the part they played as the intellectual artificers of the Revolution horrified the half-blinded middle-classes who had only just achieved the conquest of political power. And, paradoxical as this may seem, at that time the spiritual heirs of the Abbe Georgel were named La Harpe and Carlyle.

However, when capitalist society and the bourgeois state were well established, the personality of Diderot attracted fresh attention from historians. They saw in him the man who waged war against feudalism. They recognised that his methods of political thinking had done much to give the new order its foundations. Diderot, the politician and the art critic, was

hence forward appreciated not unfairly; Diderot the man was drawn with more sympathy. But Diderot the materialist, exponent of atheism and of natural morality, remained a kind of bogey-man for bourgeois historians.

The years 1860-70 mark a new phase in the history of research into his work. Bersot in France, Rosenkrantz in Germany, even Morley in England, devoted full - length monographs to him.

While they make no attempt to disguise either his materialism or the conclusions which follow from it, they exert themselves to 'explain' his materialist 'aberrations' by the conditions of his age, to make excuses for his atheism to some extent, to justify his moral precepts. They were not his intellectual heirs, it was his personality rather than his philosophy which allured them; consequently they failed to bring to the light a great deal of the wealth which Diderot bequeathed. Nevertheless, in spite of the decades which separated them from him, they aimed to the best of their power at calm and impartial research.

Nearer to our own day, it is unfortunate that the studies of Diderot called forth by the revival of philosophical controversy are mostly written by notable idealists. Apart from the labours of Assezat, Tournaux and Reinach, who are indifferent rather than impartial, a very remarkable tendency appears in bourgeois university circles. Diderot is declared to have been an idealist, a little illogical maybe, but an authentic idealist. Caro and Janet make vain endeavours to show that he returned to idealism in his declining years. Doumic goes so far as to dispute the genuineness of texts, which are genuine beyond all doubt. All these writers want to turn Diderot into an ally of their own. More recently still, Ducros reverts to personal attacks, and undertakes a regular man-hunt once again. Canon Marcel sets up against Diderot, 'labouring for posterity', his brother the fanatical canon, "labouring for eternity." And it is just possible to cite Collignon's book as an exception among all these productions.

This short list by itself will show the reader Diderot's originality and freshness. Many of his scientific ideas have lived for nearly two centuries; otherwise, how would they exist? But however much his political and moral theories may bear the mark of his time, the huge heritage of his works yields many pages which still have reality and relevance for today. His coherent philosophic materialism, the elements of his dialectic, his militant and witty atheism, his eternal leap into the future, his turbulent and insatiable temperament, all make Diderot a true contemporary of our own. That is why no materialist who studies the history of his own conception of the world should remain indifferent to so great a master.

The author of this book is well aware that a book dedicated to a thinker - above all, to Diderot - should not be a substitute for books by the thinker himself. Only by studying the original text is it possible to acquire a direct understanding and appreciation of the philosopher's ideas. But he has sought to present Diderot's ideas (often scattered through ten or twenty volumes) coherently and systematically, in order to make easy the study of this writer who was perhaps the ablest representative of French materialism. Seeing him as his contemporaries saw him, as a philosopher first and foremost, the author has made no effort to arrange his book in strict chronological order; he has preferred to devote a separate essay to each problem.

This method appears to him the only right one for a study of Diderot, both as a man and as a thinker. It will be for the reader to judge how well the task is performed.

We have been compelled, by the wish to put the result of our researches in a convenient form, to repeat truths which are so well known that they have become platitudes; and in the same way, the arrangement of the work in chapters has led us into repetitions which appear unavoidable. But, on the other hand, by dealing with particular questions separately we have been steadily deterred from more popular exposition, since

the fundamental problem which we set before ourselves was not only to rediscover Diderot's ideas, but to interpret them, to pick up again the bonds which link them with their own age, with earlier thinkers, and with the real principles of dialectic materialism.

Chapter one

ENVIRONMENT - LIFE

1. Social Classes in 18th Century France The Chief Tendencies in the Philosophy of the Leaders of Thought.

It is said that the writer who outlasts his age is the one who could express it most completely and most concretely, with the greatest skill and the fullest emphasis. To do this, it is by no means necessary for him to express accurately and with discrimination all the ideas and aspirations diffused through every social class of his time; still less need he rise above classes and speak to posterity in prophetic strain. Any such attempt will cause him to go down by an inevitable stroke to sudden death and prompt oblivion.

The writer who outlasts his age is the very one who was a flesh-and-blood member of his class, who stood up widely and wisely for its interests, who defended it with the greatest power. In historical circus, in the retrospect of successive generations, such a writer will have varying judgments passed on him according to the class affiliations of his future judges; but he himself will have achieved immortality in the sense which Diderot and Feuerbach bestowed upon this word - the immortality of human memory.

Should it happen that this same writer is endowed with a many-sided personality which refuses to be confined in any one sphere of science or of art, the number of those who cherish his memory and make it their business to know him will be even greater.

Such is the case with Denis Diderot. More than a hundred and fifty years have gone by since his death; yet there is not one serious work on the history of philosophy, on atheism, literature, art or the drama, in which there is no mention of Diderot and his views, greatly as the estimate of them may vary. If this is not Diderot's fault; the blame must be laid on the erring historians.

The reason lies not only in the many-sided personality of Diderot, that mind which contained his age like an encyclopaedia, yet never descended to the failings of the pedant who knows a bit of everything - and how many of such pedants has history forgotten. It is rather because, child of his generation and therefore kept within the age, child of his class, and in consequence the interpreter of its needs, he expressed, most concretely and with the fullest emphasis, most accurately and with the fullest ability, the essential and guiding ideas of that class - a class which was once the advance-guard of French society.

He was born and brought up in the pre-revolutionary France of the eighteenth century; he grew and struggled in a well-defined political and mental atmosphere, side by side with, and in a sense at the head of, the eighteenth-century French bourgeoisie- giving voice to its different views, attitudes, and theories in every realm of art and knowledge; in technical science, economics, politics, abstract science, philosophy, literature and art. He was the outstanding and most authentic master of its ideas. That is why, if you search the historical context of the culture which that class possessed on its march to power, you find the name of Diderot occurring again and again. If he was the most faithful reflection of his age, it is for the very reason that, fighting as he did, in the field of ideas, in the front rank of the revolutionary bourgeoisie - whose ideals have since then been betrayed by its degenerate children - he was a true incarnation of culture itself, as it took form in the course of subsequent generations. That, undoubtedly, is why he was the favourite author of Karl Marx, and today,

those who try to solve the problem of our cultural heritage and its foundations must pay particular attention to his voice.

That voice rang out in France in the latter half of the eighteenth century. England and the Netherlands had long outlived their bourgeois revolutions. In England the thunder of the "Great Rebellion" so called by its timorous descendants when they spoke of 1641 - had long died away. Dead, too, was the "glorious" revolution of 1688, which had not, indeed, spilt any blood, but had achieved a practical compromise between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. In a parliamentary system based on two parties, Whigs and Tories, took power by turns. To the French bourgeoisie this peaceful regime looked like a far-off but alluring dream. Montesquieu, concluding, by some queer paradox, that this pattern of an ideal Constitution was the realisation of his views on the "separation of functions," set to work to make it known in France. Thus, in France, the doctrine of "separation" of the functions of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary became for long years the political ideal of middle-class liberalism.

In the Netherlands no less, the bourgeois revolution, which had fused with the movement for national liberation, with the struggle against Spain for independence, had outlived its heroic age. Since the middle of the seventeenth century Holland had become, in Marx's phrase, "a model Capitalist State." She already owned Colonies; in her exploitation of the working masses she followed all the rules of the manufacturing game. Liberty of press and liberty of conscience were reckoned among her blessings.

It was to Holland that Descartes emigrated in the seventeenth century, anxious to escape the persecution of which he ran a risk in France, because his philosophy did not square with Catholic orthodoxy. It was in Holland that Pierre Bayle was established at the turn of the seventeenth century; thence he launched the attack of a sceptic on the foundations of Catholicism. In the course of the eighteenth century numbers of impru-

dent theorists of the radical middle-class took refuge there, in hurried flight from the Bastille. And if anyone sought to publish an anti-Catholic pamphlet, or even a pamphlet attacking the French political regime, the surest place to try was this same Holland, in the town of Amsterdam, with the publisher Marc-Michel Rey.

Although there was a country on the French border with such a highly evolved economic and social structure, although a near neighbour of France had a political system so far in advance of the age, yet France itself was weighed down by absolutism. The States-General, that mediaeval institution which was destined to represent the classes, had not been summoned since 1614. The formula thrown out by Louis XIV - "L' Estat c'est moi" - was wearing somewhat thin by the middle of the eighteenth century, but it remained the official motto of royal France.

This political absolutism, however, was only the surface covering of an economic system which was fairly complex and diverse. In rural economy, the principles and traditions of feudalism were still firmly rooted. If serfdom as a whole was abolished, the peasants were nonetheless stifled by the yoke of taxes and forced labour. The landed nobility remained always the ruling class. Church and monastic foundations owned a disproportionate amount of land.

Side by side with these survivals, the economy of capitalist production was beginning to be established in the towns. There was an increase in manufactures, a development of trade, including foreign trade, an enlargement of the part played by bank capital. French exports touched 106 million francs in 1720, 124 millions in 1735, 192 millions in 1748. They were still growing in the latter half of the century, touching 257 millions in 1755 and 309 millions in 1776.

The middle-class, which thus grew and established itself without ceasing, was always lending considerable sums to the government, which was everlastingly hard up. Towards the middle of the century, interest on

the public debt alone amounted to 18 million francs. In 1755 this sum rose to 45 millions; in 1776 it reached the figure of 106 millions. Nevertheless, the middle class was not only without political rights, but in the Third Estate it was undistinguished from the great mass of the tax-payers.

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, absolutist France was on the eve of an industrial revolution. Following the example of Holland and England, which were much more highly developed economically and politically, she was crammed with industrial capitalism, and this was bringing with it the development of the forces of production. But this development was held in check by the regime of production, and especially by the legal formulae which expressed it. The old semi-feudal social procedures were sanctified by the political superstructure which embodied them. In a word, there might be seen the ripening of the gigantic conflict which was only to be resolved in 1789 in the model of all Bourgeois revolutions.

But all this was still far off when Diderot made his first appearance in literature, at the beginning of the latter half of the century. There was a long road still to travel, and on the way the bourgeoisie was to increase in strength, materially and intellectually. The class contradictions which had been maturing for so long had not, for the moment, provoked more than a few small skirmishes. The class struggle showed itself in the form of religious controversies, which changed, in proportion as the struggle intensified, into regular battles of ideas.

Superficially, looking at life in its outward forms alone, it was a decorous and well-regulated world. Legally and politically the population was divided into three distinct classes; the nobility, the clergy and the Third Estate. But admittedly the division had never been an accurate expression of the real structure of the social order, and in any case it was hopelessly out of date in the eighteenth century. While, in the course of

centuries the underground processes of history were working themselves out, the true class distinctions, concealed by this threefold legal system, were compelled to fight their real battle.

Even the aristocracy, that ruling caste immune from all taxation, was far from being a homogeneous bloc. Apart from agricultural magnates, among whom could be reckoned the princes of the blood, there was a rank and file, often penniless, whose task it was to fill the public offices; it consisted of the aristocracy of the sword - the higher ranks of the army - and the aristocracy of gown - members of the provincial council and high officials of state. Nor should we forget the aristocracy of the heart - some of them dignitaries, others plain prostitutes - who were personally attached to the king or who clustered about the royal family; the aristocracy of the countryside, settled in their mansions and estates; country squires and gentlemen of patriarchal habits, whose life was not always very different from that of a prosperous peasant. As a whole, the aristocrats were reactionary or conservative.

The clergy, that other privileged class exempt from taxation, were no less differentiated. At the top were the beneficiaries of huge estates which had the monastic order as their official landlords. By the trick called "primogeniture", the younger sons of the nobility, cut off from all share in the family heritage, went to swell the ranks of the clergy. Thanks to their family connections they formed a caste of cassocked magnates, the Princes of the Church. Thus, united by the same class interests, the chiefs of the privileged orders met one another at the top of the tree. Need it be added that the chiefs of the clergy were no less reactionary, or at least, conservative? Sword and cross served one interest, followed one end.

In the towns, however, a strange type of churchman was to be met with; the enlightened parson who haunted the salons of the middle-class.

Often a freethinker, he was sometimes, strange it sounds, an atheist. This layer of the clergy which was attracted by the Third Estate and especially by its bourgeois elements, had not, it is true, any great importance in numbers. All the same, they belonged to the enlightened and moderate wing of the middle-class, and the fact should be chronicled. Such were the Abbes Morellet and Yvon, who were encyclopaedists, such Mably and Morelly, associated, not unjustly, with the school of Rousseau, such the Abbe Galiani and many others, who made their mark more or less deeply as political theorists, economists or men of letters.

Lastly, a whole section of the clergy consisted of country parsons, the parish priests of the peasantry, whose way of life was like that of their parishioners. There were some who carried out, faithfully and conscientiously, their duty of oppression, stifling the least awakening of consciousness in the workers under the dogmas of the Catholic Church. Others, tiny minority as they were, held their position, but held it with their ears open, and in the silence of the presbytery put together treatises full of liberalism and atheism. Such, for instance, was the parish priest Neslier; such was Dom Deschamps, the prior of a monastery in old Portou.

If the nobles and the clergy had so little uniformity, how much more complex, how much more diverse, in its class composition, was the Third Estate! It included the peasant masses, nearly 20 million people; the lower middle classes of the towns, shopkeepers and artisans, manufacturing craftsmen in ever-growing numbers, side by side with their clients and their domestic servants, and with the middle and upper bourgeoisie.

The social paradox of pre-revolutionary France lay in this very fact, that by the will of an autocratic government the bourgeoisie, cut off from all rights and privileges, was enclosed in the frame work of the Third Estate. While the economic and even the political development of the country was

bound up with its future, it was treated like dirt by the class which still held power.

Yet it was the vocation of this bourgeoisie to create, by the hands of the exploited workers and by the power of industrial tactics perfectly evolved, a new mode of production. Daily and hourly, in the subsoil of the old order, it developed its technique and its culture. It learnt to contend with the governing classes, and from now onwards felt capable of doing so, not only in the field of technical science and economics, but equally in that of political philosophy and art. But for the time being, debarred from power, it was confined in the grooves of official political life. Diderot was no aloof and unconcerned spectator in the drama of revolution which was thus unfolding itself. He took part in it, as an actor who lived the drama because it was his own.

France, at this turning - point of her history, could take no other road than that of capitalism. In the light of this account, it was clearly impossible for either nobles or clergy, with their innate conservatism, to lead her by that road; nor yet could the peasantry, who were not capable of creating a coherent ideology, still less of finding language to express it, nor the lower middle class, for all its radical attitude to political questions, since it was chasing its utopian dream of escape from capitalist development. It follows that the upper middle class alone was the pioneer to show France the way of her future; and though it was true that this class acted in the name of the whole Third Estate, its real object was to impose its own leadership. Historians make a big mistake of method when they talk of "leading lights" and "encyclopaedists" in general, and take no trouble to indicate the social struggles which gave rise to the conflict of ideas within the Third Estate itself. For although, right up to 1789, the Third Estate found its chief enemy in absolutism, although it formed a solid front against what it called "tyranny" and "fanaticism," yet as soon as it was concerned with its own needs and its positive programme, its unity

was much more insecure. So, to find out the place taken and the part played in history by Diderot and his circle, it is useful to go deeply into the social elements of the Third Estate, and the battle of ideas in which those elements found expression.

It has been shown already that the Third Estate was a confused mass of classes. It cannot, therefore, be said that it had built up a system of thought "one and indivisible." The different groups were absorbed in a determined struggle for the conquest of intellectual leadership. To be more exact, within the ferment of thought which was stirring the different social classes, wrongly associated under the name of "Third Estate", there were four groups : Voltaire and the Voltairians; Rousseau and his followers; the physiocrats; and the materialists and atheists.

Had each of these groups been asked to define its actual position on "fanaticism" and "tyranny", the answers would have been far from unanimous. These problems, however, were of decisive importance for eighteenth century France.

"For the King, against God and the Church". This, though somewhat too sharply formulated, was the position of Voltaire. He opposed tyranny, and wanted to limit the power of the Crown; but his political intentions never went beyond a confused liberalism. Similarly, he attacked fanaticism and in this sense was against God; but in this sense only. For his grudge was against the Catholic God, or to be more accurate, the Catholic Church. All the world knows the countless arrows, epigrams and satires he hurled against it, the part he played in the Calas incident, his war-cry; "Ecrasez l'infame!" Voltaire, indeed, took sides against all orthodoxy, against Judaism, Mahomednism, every religion in history, but not against God in the abstract.

There are many stories to this effect, which may be imaginary but are nonetheless significant. One of his contemporaries tells how, to avoid

being inconvenienced by some formality or other, Voltaire went through a certain religious rite: when it was pointed out that this docile behaviour did not square with his philosophic convictions, he replied that he was ready to compromise with circumstance much farther than that and that, had he been an Indian, he would have bowed before convention and held the tail of the sacred cow. Mallet du Pan recalls how a discussion about the existence of God arose in a drawing-room. Some atheistical views were exchanged, and Voltaire, suddenly uneasy, begged them to break off; for, he said, if the servants find out that there is no God, they will undoubtedly rob and kill their masters... And again, Voltaire is responsible for the formula: "If there were no God, it would be necessary to invent him."

Mere tales, it may be said. Perhaps so, but never mind. Voltaire was no atheist. He was a deist, touched with rationalism, who was incapable of rising to the denial of a divine principle, a universal creator. His *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, committed to the flames in a public square, was moderate indeed in comparison with any of Holbach's atheistical pamphlets. He was imbued with an eclectic philosophy, which was ultimately dualist. In 1770, when that atheist's Bible, the *Système de la Nature*, appeared, Voltaire was quite consistent in making haste to dissociate himself from the materialist school of Diderot and Holbach.

In the sphere of religion and philosophy, then, Voltaire and the Voltairians were content to shake the foundations of the altar. In the sphere of politics, their modest ideal was the limitation of absolute power. Indisputably they had their use in the progress of their generation, but they really represented the liberal and ultra moderate wing of the upper middle-class and the aristocracy.

Faced with the same question, Rousseau, on the other hand, would have declared himself firmly against the King. But on the subject of God, he would show himself even more moderate than Voltaire. He changed his own religion twice over, so that it is impossible to say that he belonged to

a definite church. But his theism is beyond all question, and so is his spirit of Calvinism. It was disagreement on religious matters which lay behind the break between the two old friends, Rousseau and Diderot. It is only necessary to read the *Confessions*, without concentrating on the romantic side of them, to realise the abyss which separated Rousseau from Diderot and Grimm.

To be sure, Rousseau's deism rested on a different basis from Voltaire's. He was no rationalist with a tinge of irony, but had the spirit of a sentimentalist. But put to the test, Rousseau, "the man of sentiment", remained as much, if not more, the prisoner of deism than the caustic Voltaire.

In his political ideals he was entirely different; his radical outlook and republican sympathies are plainly in evidence. Catherine -II, who dallied with Voltaire from a distance, who had enough regard for d'Alembert to wish him to be the tutor of the Crown Prince Paul, who heaped her "benefactions" on Diderot, quite justifiably took no interest in Rousseau whatever.

Quite justifiably; for Rousseau was the most outstanding theorist of the lower middle class, whose political intentions are liable to be much fiercer and more clearly defined than those of the upper layers of the bourgeoisie.

The Revolution of '89 has made this clear with a vengeance. *Mutatis mutandis*, it was Rousseau who spoke through Robespierre's mouth. Robespierre, at the height of the Jacobin dictatorship, replaced the cult of Reason by that of the Supreme Being. In doing so, he rejected Deism, in which divinity is recognised as a transcendent principle, and affirmed Theism, which is the acknowledgment of God as a being not undefined and abstract, but real; and this is the characteristic of Rousseau's thinking.

The spirit of the Republic was the extreme form of political radicalism visualised by the lower middle class of that time, and hence also by Rousseau; and it compromised with the principles of reaction in the realm of social as well as of natural philosophy. Some of the most crucial declarations in which the political aims of the lower middle class were expressed, revolutionary as they might be in appearance, were altogether reactionary from the economic point of view.

At a time when economic production was evolving in the sense of industrial capitalism, the lower middle class, which had tasted the delights of competition, conceived the ideal of a society which should be comfortable without luxury. In order to banish envy and the passions which make for trouble, this city of dreams had to be a city of equality. Equality of wealth must control its production and consumption. This levelling tendency fitted in beautifully with the principle of the "happy mean", which was the ruling principle of their Arcadia. "Aurea mediocritas" was the motto of their Utopian dreams. So Rousseau, along with the class whose needs he expressed, interpreted beneficent nature's various "appeals" and "voices". This, then, was Utopia, for the very reason that the paths of French economic development were tending exactly in the opposite direction. The real future belonged to capitalism, with all the consequences which flow from it for the lower middle class.

As for the physiocrats, they had a keen sense of historical reality of another kind. In spite of a few personal differences, every one of them made his contribution to the establishment of capitalism. They were revolutionaries, to the extent that their attitude on essential problems made them work in the direction of history, but in the intellectual movement they took their stand on the extreme right. They approved of the Crown - without undue tyranny; they recognised religion - but without fanaticism. But

they never dreamed of upholding atheism, still less of spreading it among the multitude.

Finally, the materialists, especially Diderot, d'Holbach and Helvetius, were the last of the four groups. They were no expert economists; they were concerned with philosophy, and more particularly with natural, or, like Helvetius, with social philosophy. Diderot and d'Holbach concentrated on religious questions. The latter was also a chemist of distinction; it was he, later, who took charge of the heading "Chemistry" in the *Encyclopaedia*. Diderot's interest in biology was well known. He was a true "pantophile", to use his friends' expression - curious about everything, alive to everything, a worker both in science and in art.

Let us set aside their economic theories, which brought them near to the physiocrats, did not Diderot recommend to Catherine Mercier de la Riviere, the author of *The Natural and Necessary Form of Bodies Politic*, whose plans miscarried, and who was unable to guide eighteenth century Russia straight down the road to capitalist development? On all other questions the materialists had views of their own, which represented admirably the opinions common to the great mass of the middle class. The most direct expression of them is d'Holbach's *System of Nature*, which Diderot certainly had a share in preparing for press.

To both the questions asked above, the materialists replied in the negative. After 1750 they denied the existence of God, without any qualification. D'Holbach even earned the title of "God's private enemy." The question of the royal power was more complex. Diderot was a passionate advocate of the theory of the separation of powers. Legislative power was the prerogative of the nation, and of the members of Parliament as its representatives. The electors could recall those whom they had chosen, when they thought fit. The executive power alone was vested in the king. Diderot, however, did not share Montesquieu's error of judgment about the

English; in England, he said, the king was "the unique marauder, against whom they are on the watch."

He assessed the worth of good and bad monarchs. Living in the "age of enlightenment", when "enlightened despots" flirted with philosophers, who flattered them, Diderot dared to tell Catherine to her face :

"All arbitrary government is bad; I am not excepting the government of a good, firm, just and enlightend ruler.... A despot, be he the best of men, commits a crime by governing according to his own will. He is an efficient herdsman, who reduces his subjects to the level of animals... One of the worst disasters which could come upon a free people would be two or three successive reigns of just and enlightened despots."

While he thus limited the royal prerogative to the exercise of executive power, Diderot went further still. He advocated a kind of elective monarchy. Pretending, as his manner was, to take up an idea of Catherine's own, he said to her during his visit to St. Petersburg in the winter of 1773-1774.

"Perhaps I should not be far from your Imperial Majesty's own feelings if I made the monarchy elective, as between the King's children; but only on condition that the choice was not made by their father. It seems to me that the people, assembled and making its choice through its representatives, would be much less liable to deception than the father."

His ideal, which was that of the French middle class, without going beyond the framework of a bourgeois state, reached the conception of a very restricted monarchy, quasi- republican in type. Thus, while the physiocrats, with their beneficent "providential" nature left throne and altar undisturbed, while Voltaire and the deists unsettled the altar but never touched the throne, while Rousseau and his disciples sought to overthrow the throne and still preserve the altar, *Diderot and the materilists shattered throne and altar at once.*

2. The Materialist Circle of Diderot and Holbach.

The collective life of the old order could not give birth to organised political parties, any more than it could find expression in a controversial public platform. Instead of the parties and the platform there were pamphlets, printed in Holland because they were considered too radical in France, the salons of the French middle class and aristocracy, and the Parisian *Republic of Letters*. Political activity was developed and expressed in the salons. The guests who repaired thither would meet for contact and discussion, grouped according to the political opinions of their host and his views on the social problem.

It was at d'Holbach's, that "innkeeper of philosophy," as the Abbe Galiani called him, that the materialists were always gathering. The regular day for these meetings, "the synagogue day," was Thursday. The master of the house was a man of great culture; he knew several languages, translated German literature indefatigably, especially for the *Encyclopaedia*, and had the reputation of a militant atheist.

His wonderful library, which Diderot very often consulted, made his house a very shrine of the *Encyclopaedia*. His salon was regularly visited not only by materialists like Diderot, Helvetius, Naigeon, and Grimm, but also by several free-thinking clergy; Raynal, believed to be the author of the *Histoire des deux lades*, Morellet, Galiani, who wrote "*Dialogues on Wheat*", Writers were to be met there, Marmontel, the author of *Belisarius*, Duclos, Saint-Lambert, and d'Alembert, the great mathematician, who collaborated in the first seven volumes of the *Encyclopaedia*.

"There", wrote Diderot, "you are sure of discussion; there you can talk history, politics, finance, literature, philosophy."

In the salon of the other materialist, Helvetius, the same group would meet, but more rarely. It did not become an important factor in the life of the "Republic of Letters" till after its master's death in 1772. Cabanis, the representative of the younger generation of materialists, and as it were, their offspring, played a considerable part in it.

The social composition of Madame Geoffrin's salon was slightly different. Its hostess kept up a correspondnece with Catherine-II. Foreigners of distinction visited her on their way through Paris. Madame de Pompadour made an occasional appearance there. Here, the "at home" days were kept to a strict programme. Mondays were set apart for artists and Wednesdays for authors. The guests had to maintain a certain discretion; it did not do to advance opinions that were too radical on politics and philosophy. It is thus easy to understand that Diderot, that "encyclopaedia of word and action" was a rare visitor there. Further, Marmontel, who was a familiar figure at this salon, said of Madame Geoffrin; "She respected Baron d'Holbach and liked Diderot, but secretly, without committing herself on their account."

Monsieu de Lespinasse, d'Alembert's friend, opened his salon about 1770. It was visited by the most diverse writers, among whom were Marmontel, Morellet, Saint-Lambert, the Abbe Condillac, author of the *Treatise on Sensations*, and Turgot. The materialists put in an occasional appearance.

Necker's wife also followed the fashion, and the prestige of its hostess soon made her salon much sought after and very influential. There, on April 17th, 1770, the guests dicided to order from Pigalle the statue of Voltaire. They opened a subscription in his lifetime. Those who took part

in this twofold decision were Diderot, Suard, Chatelet, Grimm, Schobert, Marmontel, d'Alembert, Tjomas, Necker, Saint-Lambert, Saurin, Raynal, Helvetius, Bernard, Arnould, Morellet.

There, in a friendly circle of materialists, on New Year's Eve of 1770, Grimm, in clerical intonation, delivered a long and amusing "sermon", in which, with neat wit, he hit off the characteristics of the principal salons :

"Let Sister Necker know that she is always to reserve Fridays for dinner : the Church will repair thither, for the honour in which it holds herself and her husband : it pleases the church to be able to speak of this around her hospitable board.

"Let Sister Lespinasse know that she cannot afford to give a dinner or supper-party, nevertheless she has good will to entertain the brethren who wish to go there to digest their own.

".....Let Mother Geoffrin know that she renews the barriers and prohibitions of former years, and that in her house it will no more be permitted than in the past to speak of foreign affairs or of home affairs, of court affairs or of town affairs, of the affairs of the North or of the South, the affairs of the East or of the West; nor of politics or finance; nor of peace or war; nor of religion or government; nor of theology or metaphysics; nor, in brief, of anything at all..... The Church, reflecting that silence, especially on the matters in question, is not its strong point, promises to obey in so far as it is compelled by violent means."

But if the French middle class of the eighteenth century created neither party nor public platform, it did, through Diderot's brain and hand, establish the *Encyclopaedia*, "the holy alliance against fanaticism and tyranny," in the words of Cabanis. A monumental synthesis of all knowledge, of the arts, the crafts and the sciences;" a living synthesis, much more than a collection of ancient documents. Inasmuch as it was a col-

lective work in seventeen volumes, to which must be added eleven volumes of illustrations, not counting the supplements and indices drawn up without Diderot, the *Encyclopaedia* was not only a focus of knowledge, but a veritable plan of campaign.

Yet, though it was supervised by the materialist Diderot with the active help of d'Holbach, on careful examination it appears by no means a materialist work. Here is a paradox which needs explanation.

True, the publisher's distortions and corrections of the proofs which Diderot had already looked through and signed go a long way towards explaining it. The last ten volumes were published in this way, without the author's knowledge, by Le Breton, who, frightened by the persecutions, "corrected" the most dangerous passages on his own initiative. But although that is an historical fact, the importance of which is not to be underestimated, nevertheless the explanation of the paradox lies deeper. In reality, Diderot and the materialists, by a kind of generalship, achieved the "united front" of the Third Estate in the pages of the *Encyclopaedia*.

Many of the collaborators who surrounded them were a long way from being materialists ; d'Alembert, who was a most noteworthy mathematician but a sceptic in philosophy, joined with Diderot in supervising the publication of the first seven volumes; Voltaire drew up the article on "the Mind," and Montesquieu on "Taste;" Rousseau concerned himself with "Political Economy", and with the heading "Music"; Burron and Daubenton took over the natural sciences; Turgot and Quesnay, physiocrat leaders, gave their assistance, along with many others.

Diderot united them all in the war against "tyranny" and "fanaticism", and chose to direct the enterprise himself rather than entrust it to more moderate minds. His materialist supervision made sure that concessions were reduced to a minimum. True, his attempts at peacemaking could not keep either d'Alembert or Rousseau. More than one collaborator

left the *Encyclopaedia*, driven to the break by fundamental disagreement with his editor-in-chief.

And yet these tactics of personal supervision were justified by their success. They succeeded in joining up the backward ranks of the bourgeoisie with the revolutionary advance guard. They put the education of the Third Estate under the control of the materialists.

In their own contributions, the materialists expressed their views without hesitation. Such are the published works, and still more, the manuscripts of Diderot, the treatises on atheism composed by d'Holbach, the books of Helvetius.

However, they had to resort to stratagem to publish their works. Helvetius' first book *On the Mind* brought him so much trouble that his second book *On Man*, had to be printed in Holland after his death. D'Holbach, too, published most of his work in Holland, with the same publisher, Marc-Michel Rey, who brought out the first collection of Diderot's *Complete Works*. Sometimes, the better to cover their traces, the cover was inscribed with "London" and the signature of a dead writer of established fame. Thus in 1770, well after his death, Mirabaud, Secretary of the French Academy, was credited with the authorship of the *System of Nature*.

Naigeon, Baron d'Holbach's friend and Diderot's executor, was the great specialist in getting manuscripts over to Holland, and later on, in the illegal publishing of books in France. Sympathetic customs and post office officials took a hand in his manoeuvres.

These few facts, in themselves, show how inaccurate is the general notion which makes out that the philosophy of the French materialists was a secret movement. This may have been true of the English materialists of the seventeenth century, who not only refrained from

propagating their theories among the masses, but, on principle, held the "common herd" incapable of digesting them. The French materialists, on the other hand, used the legal possibilities to supplement their illegal work, and made a definite effort to make their philosophy accessible to the great mass of the Third Estate.

Further, the philosophy itself was not the fruit of academic and isolated thinking, detached from the world. They built up their broadest structures of theory, if not by collective work (though it is said that a whole group of them collaborated in the *System of Nature*), at least in the course of friendly discussion. The literary form of some of Diderot's work is affected by this process of group elaboration. For he was the moving spirit of their discussions, at once leader, speaker, and able opponent, and it was his ideas which would develop and express the feeling of his partners, while their own were still confused.

His most intimate friends, who shared both in his theories and his life (though this does not mean that there were no shades of difference in their views, or even disagreements and arguments about some given problem) were d'Holbach, Naigeon, Helvetius, and Grimm. Their friendship lasted more than twenty years, and was much closer and more enduring than that of the Hegelians of the Left in Germany, on the eve of the 1848 revolution, or that which bound "the men of 1840" in Russia. They formed a friendly circle of materialists, the theorists of the French middle-class of their generation.

"Tell me who are your associates...." an ancient proverb teaches. It does not, however, apply fully to Diderot. For Diderot, the soul of his group, borrowed far less than he bestowed. All the same, it is necessary to cast a glance at his immediate surroundings if we would understand the personality of this man who was the intellectual leader of the pre-revolutionary middle-class. The study of them will prove how accurate was Marx's

famous statement, that, in periods of revolutionary change, thinkers and politicians pass from one class to another.

That is the exact truth about d'Holbach. His real name was Paul Thiry d'Holbach, Baron of Heese, Lord of Leande, Walberg and other estates. He was thus of aristocratic lineage; he was a person of consequence, rich and titled; he possessed the Castle of Granval, where Diderot loved so much to rest and work in summer, as well as his own mansion in Paris; he was a gentleman of means whose son was captain of a regiment of dragoons at Schomberg. Yet in the spreading of materialism this baron did infinitely more than other thinkers of the "age of enlightenment", just as in the struggle which raged over religion, to purify the middle-class conscience from its intoxication, he played a more important part than Voltaire. His chief works - the *System of Nature*, the *Social System*, *Universal Morality*, *Natural Politics* - his small anti-religious pamphlets, *Portative Theology*, *Christianity Unveiled*, *The Plague of Holiness*, *The Priests Unmasked*, *David; the Story of the Man after God's Own Heart*, etc - built up a whole system, coherent and well thought-out; they bear witness to the whole of the author's immense learning, and stand in the perspective of history as a pattern, still unequalled, of the atheist propaganda to which the revolutionary middle-class was committed in the eighteenth century. To this middle-class d'Holbach, perhaps somewhat drily and pedantically, gave a theory of the universe and a programme of social aims.

Another of Diderot's friends, Claude Adrien Helvetius, came from a different background. To use the later Russian expression, he belonged to the intelligentsia, the middle-class members of the liberal professions. His father, who was a court doctor and personal physician to the queen, intended him for a financial career. After a period of work with an influential tax-collector, Helvetius, thanks to his father's connections, became "tax-farmer general".

To appreciate his "function in society", it is necessary to see what this office meant in the old order. Financial embarrassments led the kings of France to hand over the responsibility for collecting taxes to certain high officials, in return for regular remittances. It is easy to imagine how this direct levy on the masses was carried out. One thing is certain: the "work" of a tax-farmer general was considered highly profitable; they made huge fortunes,

It is therefore easy to imagine the uproar caused in Paris by an unexpected piece of news : Helvetius had resigned, retired from business, given up the revenues entrusted to him so lucratively, and become an independent man of letters. It is true that he was sure of a permanent competence, for he possessed a house and an estate, but in giving up his office he gave up all profit for the future.

From that day onward he devoted himself wholly to literary work. Not counting a very mediocre poem, called *Happiness* a sort of bourgeois Utopia - he wrote two serious works: *On the Mind and On Man*. The publication of the first, in 1758, involved him in legal proceedings : the book was condemned to the flames, and perhaps it was only his old family connections that saved Helvetius from the heaviest penalties. However, condemnation did not hinder the book's popularity; it contained a consistent social philosophy, and a tentative effort to apply materialist ideas to moral problems. It was read everywhere, even in Russia, where an abridged translation of it entitled *Helvetius on the Mind* was made by Tambov in 1788, not to mention that many separate chapters were reproduced in various publications of the time.

Helvetius' second work, *On Man*, appeared in Holland after the writer's death, with the consent of Prince D.A. Galitzin, who was a friend of the Encyclopaedists. It gave a theoretical basis to the pre-revolutionary ideas on education. Although there was a whole range of important ques-

tions on which Diderot and Helvetius did not understand one another, the 200 pages which Diderot devoted to a study of this book bear witness to its importance in his eyes.

Reference may also be made to the French materialists who did not belong to the Paris nucleus. Such for example was La Mettrie, their senior, who was a typical representative of the middle-class intelligentsia, first a regimental doctor for a while, and later a member of the Berlin Academy and the guest of Frederick of Prussia; and Robinet, who was a typical literary Bohemian. Returning to the Diderot-d'Holbach circle, one might also cite Naigeon, who represented the rising generation of materialists and was a kind of literary secretary and assistant to the Baron; Grimm less of an intellectual than the others, a little spoiled by his association with the aristocracy, "the ambassador of the Republic of Letters in the courts of German Princes;" he died, after the Revolution, as the Russian ambassador in Saxony. Always we reach the same conclusion: no matter what their social origins, all the materialists in the latter half of the eighteenth century belonged to the French middle-class because of their intellectual aims, and, owing to their culture, formed the advance-guard of this class.

Now let us pause over the study of their leader, Diderot, and investigate his personality, his views, and his historical destiny.

3. Diderot's Childhood and Youth

Diderot was born at Langres on October 1st 1713, in the family of a working cutler. The leader of the materialist school thus sprang from a petit-bourgeois background. His personal tastes and habits bore traces of it. His birth predestined him to be, in a way, the nearest to the people of all the Encyclopaedists. Recent researches, however, have led to the abandonment of the old belief that he belonged to the lower section of the middle-class or even to the poverty-stricken family of a manual worker.

The archives of the town of Langres were investigated in 1913 on the occasion of Diderot's bicentenary, and they show that his family was fairly well off. Their calling of cutlery was hereditary, and its history can be traced for two hundred years. Thus, Diderot's father was no "hearthless, homeless man." On the contrary, his family had a certain prestige in the neighbourhood. Their circumstances had improved from one generation to another, and of the philosopher's father still worked at his table, there is no doubt that he had helpers and apprentices at his service, and was the owner of a store where he himself sold the products of his own workshop. When he died, he left not only a house but a considerable amount of landed property, and a fortune of which a part, valued at more than two hundred thousand francs, fell to the philosopher.

Diderot senior showed an overmastering desire to push his children into "society." Now, at that time a lower-middle-class man with this ambition had only one way open to him: to send his sons into monastic orders, and those of his daughters who could not find husbands into some wealthy convent. Following the regular custom and precedents, Diderot senior sent

his two surviving sons, Denis the elder and Didier the younger, to the Jesuit College at Langres, and compelled one of his daughters to take the veil. His sister's fate afterwards prompted Diderot to write *The Nun*. As for his brother, he became a zealous canon of Langres Cathedral, and to this day the French clergy contrast him, as an example and a reproach, with Denis the atheist. One must admit that the latter's fate was perhaps a queer one: he set out to be a spiritual teacher, and ended up an atheist and a materialist.

We know very little about these early years of study. The only information which can be collected is provided by Diderot's own stories, the memoirs of his daughter, Madame de Vandeul, and the memoirs of Naigeon. The latter, however, only picked up his friend's remarks. But all these scraps of evidence show that Denis was a boy of strong character, enormous intellectual curiosity, and outstanding ability.

The Jesuits, who are excellent teachers and master of the art of drawing their pupils' confidence, took notice of this gifted child so full of promise. Seeing his passionate love for long walks, they persuaded him to slip out of his father's house and join one of his teachers in a runaway adventure. Caught by his father on the night when he was setting out, the boy confessed that he had intended to make his way "to Paris, where he was going to be a Jesuit." We may add at this point, that he had already shaved his head. His father answered : *"Not tonight, but you shall have your wish. Now go to sleep."*

A less romantic explanation of the events which followed is also possible. Diderot went through the course in rhetoric ; there remained the courses in philosophy and theology. His father was concerned about his education, and according to Naigeon :

"Wished to make him neither a scholar nor a man of letters, but, a much rarer and more difficult achievement, a reasonable theologian ; he took him to Paris at the age of fifteen or so."

In Paris, Diderot entered Harcourt College. There he studied Latin and Greek and mathematics. These, as Naigeon says, "filled him with dislike and mistrust of theology." All the same, notwithstanding its excellent educational system, this college could not give Diderot as wide an intellectual horizon as he found for himself. A small but significant anecdote comes down from these student days. The pupils were set an exercise : to write in Latin verse the beguiling speech which the Serpent addressed to Eve, to make her taste the forbidden fruit. One of his friends could not do the task and Denis wrote his verses for him ; not without getting punished for it by the teacher, who discovered the fraud.

When he had finished his college studies on September 2nd, 1732, Diderot was given the degree of Master of Arts. To his father's great displeasure, he would not hear of an ecclesiastical career. Consequently, some vocation had to be found for him. A fellow citizen, the attorney Clement de Ris, agreed to employ Denis. But Denis was much more interested in studying the English language, which at the time was in demand in the circles of society and science, than in the business of his employment. Just at that time, as Naigeon declares, he literally flung himself into the writings of Hobbes, Locke, and Newton.

The elder Diderot pressed his son : he wanted to see his choose, if not an ecclesiastical vocation, at least some definite and "suitable" career. If Madame de Vandeul is to be believed, Diderot made the most scandalous retorts.

"He said a doctor's profession did not appeal to him, since he had no wish to kill anyone ; that of an attorney was too difficult to carry out tactfully; he would gladly choose to be a lawyer except for his invincible dislike of spending his whole life over other people's business."

Finally, his father decided to settle the problem roughly, and sent Diderot an ultimatum. Either Denis must come back to Langres, or his

father would cut off his allowance. The son chose the second alternative, and remained permanently in Paris. This happened about 1733-4. For Diderot, it was the beginning of the independent life of a Bohemian artist.

He lived in a garret, with his door always open to friends who had no settled occupation or permanent home. His clothing was not conspicuous either for quality or newness. Later, Rameau's nephew gave his reminiscences : "He is sometimes as thin and was as an invalid, in dirty linen and torn breeches, in tatters and almost without shoes."

His father was harsh, stuck to his point, and sent no money. His mother-three times in ten years - sent him insignificant sums. Diderot lived as best he could. He gave lessons in mathematics, and later on in English ; he edited so and so's papers and someone else's letters; he composed speeches; sometimes he even wrote sermons; he prepared some, for instance, for a missionary who wanted to carry the Word of God to the American Indians.

Not till 1741 did he begin a more regular life. He made the acquaintance of his future wife, Antoinette Champion, a modest, undistinguished girl. At the time she was living with her mother, the widow of a bankrupt business man, who had a small drapery business. A short while later Diderot asked for her hand and the young couple were faced with a twofold resistance - the bride's mother and the bridegroom's father. The former.

".....thought it very indiscreet to marry such a scatterbrain, a man who did nothing, whose strong point, she said, was a golden tongue with which he had turned her daughter's brain."

As for the father, he went on insisting that his son must find a steady job. Diderot made a journey to Langres to convert the old man, but without avail. Later, he described these incidents of his life in the *Father of a Family*. There remained only one way out, a secret wedding. Diderot submitted, and was privately married on November 6th, 1743.

About this time his literary earnings became more regular. He translated from English three volumes of *History of Greece*, which appeared at the end of 1743. With two collaborators, he started on the translation of a medical dictionary in six volumes, under the supervision of Buffon, who composed the Preface. Undoubtedly, it was at this time, arising out of the specialised dictionary, that the idea of a great encyclopaedic dictionary took root in his mind.

Perhaps because he felt that he was now committed to a literary life with some chance of success, Diderot decided to make it up with his father. Since his secret marriage appeared to be a difficulty in the way of reconciliation, he used it to open the subject. He simply sent his wife to Langres, and wrote to his parents that -

"She set out yesterday, she will arrive in three days' time. Tell her anything you like, and send her back when you are tired of her."

As it turned out, this method proved most effective; his parents soon accepted the accomplished fact, and kept their daughter-in-law for three months.

As soon as he felt thus safe in his chosen path, Diderot gave up translation and concentrated on original work. At the same time, his philosophic doctrine was taking shape, from origins that were not quite traditional.

It would, of course, be inaccurate to portray Diderot as a revolutionary thinker from the start. We have seen that his ideas matured along with those of the middle-class, and developed at its head. Just at the mid-point between the first and second halves of the eighteenth century, the pulse of political life began to beat fiercely. The words of Marx about Germany in 1848 could be applied to the absolutist France of this period.

"Criticism of heaven turned into criticism of the earth, criticism of religion into criticism of law, criticism of catholic theology into criticism of politics."

In eighteenth century France, the criticism of Catholic theology was heavy with political significance. For that very reason, Diderot began his study of it, as the second chapter of this book will show.

In 1741, under the title *Essay on Merit and Virtue*, there appeared Diderot's translation of *The Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions*, by the English moral philosopher Shaftesbury. Diderot dedicated it to his younger brother, who had now become a cleric of some importance at Langres. In the dedication he indicated that his aim was to show that fanaticism and religion are incompatible, and that it is not enough to be pious in order to be virtuous. Thus moderately began Diderot's intellectual growth; but this idea in itself was enough to irritate the young priest and to rouse him against his elder brother, who was sliding down the slope of vice and heresy.

At this time, Denis formed a friendship with Rousseau. They knew each other in 1741. But it was between 1746 and 1749 that they were meeting most frequently, and having passionate arguments across the table in some small tavern. The third party in these friendly discussions was the Abbe Condillac.

All three would talk of English philosophy, and especially of Locke's. Each made an effort to apply the principles of empiricism and sensationism in the realm in which he was most interested; Diderot, at least to start with, in theology; Condillac in psychology and the theory of knowledge; Rousseau in problem of social philosophy and education. Diderot, however, had the most universal mind of the whole group; there is every reason to think that he suggested to Condillac the basic idea of his *Treatise on Sensation*, and to Rousseau the latter's famous answer to the

question set by the Academy of Dijon ; *Whether the advance of science and art has tended to corrupt or to purify morals?*

But the intellectual roads which the three friends followed tended further and further apart. Condillac had passed the boundary of Locke's philosophy when he rejected the equivalence of reflection and sensation as sources of knowledge; nevertheless, he remained for ever the prisoner of phenomenalism. Rousseau had never departed from deism, of a sensationalist kind. Diderot alone went further. From 1749 he was sketching out a programme for philosophical materialism. From about 1749-50 the meetings were growing fewer, the intimate conversations disappearing. In 1758 a sudden break separated Diderot and Rousseau.

In 1746, Diderot published his *Reflections of a Philosopher*, anonymously. Although these Reflections hardly went further than deism, the author was already paying attention to the arguments of the atheists.

Finally, in 1749, the *Letter on the Blind, for the Use of Those Who See*, was already an outline of materialist philosophy.

In these same years, Diderot tried his pen in the realm of literature. His first works, *Improper Gems*, *The White Bird*, and *Blue Story*, are in no way characteristic and foreshadow neither the originator of "bourgeois drama" nor the author of *Jacques the Fatalist*. *Improper Gems* is a distinctly indecent book. All the same, it is bound up with a whole literature in the same style, which was very common in the age of rococo. *The Blue Bird* is a narrative, a story in which certain political allusions are not wanting, and these allusions made trouble for their author.

Though Diderot published his works anonymously he was under observation by the police, and when the French political horizon clouded over he was put in prison. The position war, that during the War of the

Austrian succession, the Government had imposed some new taxes which were to be abolished after the signing of peace. The peace was definitely made in April 1748, but the taxes went on. The people began to refuse payment, and the Parliaments, where the opposition was also increasing, approved of their refusal. The hard-pressed Government made some concessions. The taxes were reduced by half, but the troubles went on. Satirical songs and caricatures began to go round. When the Church took some repressive measures, a whole series of leaflets and pamphlets made their appearance, aimed against the Government and the King.

In July and August 1749, the political situation was particularly delicate. The Government then decided on measures of wholesale repression. The Bastille and Vincennes were quickly filled with scores of writers, literary men, scholars, and even Jansenist clergy. Diderot thus found himself locked up among the first, in Vincennes, which had become a royal prison. His arrest took place on July 24th, 1749.

The questions put to him at his examination showed that the police were well aware of his literary "offences." They bore witness too to Diderot's fine courage, his stoical resistance and denials.

"Asked his name, surname, age, rank, parish, address, occupation and religion :

Said his name was Denis Diderot, born at Langres, aged 36, living in Paris at the time of his arrest, in the Rue Vieille Estrapade, Parish of Saint-Etienne du Mont, religion, Roman Catholic Apostolic.

Asked if he was the author of a book entitled Letters on the Blind, for the Use of Those who See :

Answered that he was not. Asked by whom he had had the said book printed : Answered that he had not had the said book printed. Asked if he had sold copies of it or given the manuscript to anyone :

Said that he had not. Asked by whom he had had the said book printed : Answered that he knew nothing. Asked if he had not had the said book in his possession in manuscript before it was printed :

Answered that he had no such manuscript in his possession either before or after it was printed.

Asked if he had not given or sent copies of the said book to various persons.

Answered that he had sent it to nobody.

Asked if he was not the author of a book which had appeared about two years previously, called *The Enchanted (sic) Gems* : Answered that he was not.

Asked if he had not sold or given the manuscript to someone for printing or for other purposes :

Answered that he had not.

Asked if he was not the author of a book which appeared a few years previously, called *Thoughts of a Philosopher* :

Answered that he was not. Asked if he knew the writer of the said book. Answered that he did not. Asked if he was not the author of a book called *The Sceptic, or the Path of Ideas* :

Answered that he was.

Asked where was the manuscript of the said book:

Answered that it no longer existed and that it was burned.

Asked if he was not the author of a book called *The White Bird*, a Blue Story :

Answered that he was not.

Asked if he had not at least worked at the correction of the said book :

Answered that he had not. Asked if he had not at least worked at the correction of the said book :

Answered that he had not.

Read to the respondent of the above examination, who declared that the answers given by him were true, persisted in his statements, and appended his signature.

Berryer

Diderot.

For twenty-eight days Diderot remained in the solitude of a prison. Permission for his release was not given till November 3rd, 1749. From that moment he entered on a new, long phase : he was henceforth to work at the creation of the Encyclopaedia.

4. The Period of the Encyclopaedia.

Diderot had the idea of creating an encyclopaedic dictionary somewhere about 1740. At the time, he came across a similar scheme evolved by a group of writers with Le Breton at their head. On the 21st of January, 1746, the latter took out a printing license for his edition and entered into negotiations with Diderot, who made sure of d'Alembert's help.

At the outset they proposed to confine their task to the revision of Chambers' English Encyclopaedia, and to be content with twelve volumes. The preliminary work was already begun before Diderot was imprisoned. It was forcibly interrupted by the arrest of the editor-in-chief. His colleagues were so disturbed that they presented the minister d'Argenson with a petition in which his release was demanded.

Once at liberty, Diderot set out with enthusiasm on the task which was to occupy him for more than twenty years. The *Prospectus of the Encyclopaedia*, published in 1750, met with a chilly reception. No one, not even Diderot perhaps, suspected the full extent and import of the undertaking. Meanwhile, he kept up his literary activity, and produced incidental essays. In 1751 he published the *Letter on the Deaf and Dumb, for the Use of Those Who Hear and Speak*, in which he dealt with a series of aesthetic questions.

At last, in 1751 the first volume of the *Encyclopaedia* came out, containing the *Preface*, of which the first two parts were written by d'Alembert, while the third, the explanation of the "genealogical tree" of science, was Diderot's. This *Preface* was destined to serve as an introduction in scientific method to the *Encyclopaedia* itself, and stands out

as a synthesis of the knowledge acquired by about the middle of the eighteenth century. But, edited by d'Alembert, it in no way expressed the contents or the spirit of the volumes to come, and still less the development of materialist ideas. Even the "genealogical tree" is only a classification of the sciences, taken from Bacon and slightly modified. It is not based on the three subjective "faculties" - *Memory*, the foundation of history, *Reason*, the foundation of philosophy, and *Imagination*, from which poetry springs?

The publication of the first volume did not evoke a single attack of a political kind; only a few epigrams, a few witty sallies, a few literary criticisms. The *Encyclopaedia* was nicknamed "the Dunces' Delight"; it was assumed that in the realm of mind and knowledge it would be analogous with Law's work in that of commerce and finance.

However, when in the following year Diderot allowed himself to join in a controversy in defence of the rationalist Abbe de Prades against the theological faculty, by preparing a booklet, also anonymous, the *Sequel to the Abbe de Prades' Defence*: when the second volume, more coherent and explicit than the first, saw the light at the beginning of 1752, ecclesiastical circles made an outcry, and on February 7th, 1752, obtained an injunction from the King forbidding both volumes together. Thus began the martyrdom of the *Encyclopaedia* and of Diderot.

The same royal decree compelled him to forfeit all his manuscripts and documents to the Jesuits and commanded them henceforward to superintend the publication of the *Encyclopaedia*. This last measure was the unkindest cut of all.

By good luck, as he remarked in writing to Grimm, who made his acquaintance in 1751 and quickly became his friend, the Jesuits forgot -

".....to carry off his philosopher's brain and intelligence, or to ask him for the key to a large number of articles, which, far from understanding, they laboured in vain to decipher."

The editors probably took the necessary steps, for the confiscated documents were restored in 1753 and the third volume of the Encyclopaedia appeared in November of the same year. From that moment until 1757, Diderot published a volume of it regularly every year. By way of compensation, he slowed down the rate of his own productions. The most important one of this period, the *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature* (1754), is a concisely materialist work, rich in aphorisms which are filled with meaning vital to his method and his theory.

During the same years his aesthetic taste matured. He set up a bourgeois art against the art of the aristocracy. In his works he depicted the simple life of simple people, their joys and sorrows which pass unobserved by the eyes of the great. Thus he created a whole school of literature which was new in its class content. In this spirit he wrote and published in 1757 the *Natural Son*, famous later even outside France, and in 1758 another piece which was likewise popular in the eighteenth century, the *Father of a Family*, which abounds with biographical references and information. In the same year the *Discourse on Dramatic Poetry* expressed his conception of drama.

In 1757 the storm - clouds gathered with concentrated force. The seventh volume of the Encyclopaedia had seen the light. The work had plenty of friends, and as many enemies. Though he had no theory which explained social facts by the relationship of classes, Diderot, in a kind of experimental classification, named unerringly the groups hostile to the Encyclopaedia.

"As our declared enemies we have the Court, the great, and the army, whose opinion is invariably that of the Court; the priests, the police, the magistrates, those of the literary world who are not co-operating in our work, and those of the general public who allow themselves to be led by the mob."

Fresh repressive measures were impending: given the situation, nothing but a suitable excuse was needed to bring them down.

The excuse was provided by the article *Geneva*, in which d'Alembert underlined, as a positive fact, the agreement of the clergy of Geneva with the doctrines of Socinianism, the same denial of the Trinity, and, in consequence, an affinity, with deism. The clergy made an infernal uproar. They denounced the Encyclopaedists' "party" as a danger to society and to the Church. D'Alembert did not know how to resist the attack. On the one hand, the Encyclopaedia was more and more steeped in materialism and atheism, which were contrary to his own beliefs; on the other, his own beliefs were apparently subversive to the Government. Result; Diderot, with a great deal of trouble, prevailed on him to finish his chapters on mathematics. However, their relations continued to be friendly after this incident.

Like d'Alembert, Voltaire advised Diderot to transfer the publication of the Encyclopaedia to another country, or even to hold it up and wait for better times. But Diderot stuck to it. He was firmly determined to carry his undertaking through to the end. With his colleagues, he agreed that the ten volumes still to come should be printed surreptitiously in France and despatched all at once to the subscribers. Thenceforth "suspensions" and bans mattered little. And on the subject of this understanding with Le Breton, Diderot wrote to Voltaire.

"We have made a fine treaty between us, like the devil and the peasant in La Fontaine. The leaves are mine, the grain his; but at anyrate, the leaves are secured to me."

However, personal squabbles and literary troubles continued to increase. In 1758 came the final break with Rousseau. In the same year *On the Mind* appeared, and the most daring passages were put down to Diderot. With redoubled force, his class enemies demanded the banning of the *Encyclopaedia*.

On February 6th, 1759, the Parliament committed Helvetius' book to the flames, held up the despatch to subscribers of the seven published volumes of the *Encyclopaedia*, and set up a special commission to investigate it in detail. On March 8th, the printers' license was withdrawn, *since it was found that the service rendered to science and art in no way balanced the wrong done to religion and morality*. Finally, on June 21st, the editors were ordered to return to each subscriber the £ 72 which had been paid on account for the volumes still unfinished. Further publication was, henceforth, impossible.

But Diderot refused to surrender. The next volume was secretly printed about autumn, 1759. The last ten volumes, and some sheafs of illustrations, saw the light, all at the same time, in 1765. Thus, it is easy to understand his refusal of Catherine's offer, when, established on the throne of the Russias, she thought of a little speculation on the *Encyclopaedia*, and in the hope of attracting the sympathy of European liberal opinion offered to arrange for the publication in Russia of the Dictionary banned in France. For he was in the act of carrying it through and perfecting it in France.

All the same, the last volumes caused him the keenest suffering. As has been said, Le Breton took just as much care of the *Encyclopaedia* as Diderot himself, but for quite other reasons. Fearing that the plot would eventually be found out, and that the punishment would fall on him, as publisher, he took the liberty of altering the text of sheets which Diderot had sent back to him as finally corrected, with his signature for the press. Once, in 1764, Diderot asked him for the proof of one of his own articles. He could not recognise his own thoughts when he saw them, so far had they been "corrected". As for the original pages, Le Breton had simply destroyed them.

In her memoirs, Madame de Vandeul says that her father cried out, flew into a passion, was on the point of giving up the work :

"I have never heard him speak calmly of this subject; he was convinced that the public, like himself, could tell what was missing in each article, and the impossibility of repairing the damage would still put him out of temper twenty years afterwards."

Diderot himself wrote indignantly to Le Breton on November 12th, 1764. "For two successive years you have basely deceived me; you have massacred this work or caused it to be massacred by a brute beast the work of twenty upright men, who have devoted to you their time, their talents and their sleepless nights, freely, for love of goodness and truth, for no reward but the hope of seeing their ideas made public, and gathering from them some of the respect which they fully deserve, and of which your injustice and ingratitude has robbed them."

What could Diderot do? While he endured, not without suffering, this irreparable alteration of his texts, he went on gathering material to prepare the forthcoming volumes. In 1772 he published the last. Thus, with the eleventh volume of illustrations, was completed a huge undertaking of enormous significance and import.

Though during these years (1757-1772) when he was working intensively on the Encyclopaedia, Diderot published little of his own, and though he certainly attributed too little importance to his own works, these years were nevertheless the most creative of his life, the period of his masterpieces. We have seen already that his genius was at home in any realm of knowledge or of art. It does not matter that most of his works of this period did not appear till after his death. Their renown spread far beyond the circle of his friends ; Grimm's manuscript journal announced and broadcast their appearance to foreign lands.

About 1773, Diderot composed his masterpieces in philosophy, such as the *Dialogue between d'Alembert and Diderot*, *d'Alembert's Dream*, and the *Sequel to the Dialogue* (1769). In 1770, going back to the theme of his *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature*, he wrote *The*

Philosophic Principles of Matter and Motion; it is more than likely that this was connected with d'Holbach's *System of Nature*, which was ready the same year. In 1772 the problems of social philosophy, as well as the religious questions which were always topical, were summed up in the *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage*.

In these years, too, he wrote his most important works of prose literature. In 1760 he wrote his famous *The Nun*; about 1762, *Rameau's Nephew*, a dialogue which is perhaps the most sparkling and animated of all his works; Marx and Engels highly appreciated it, and its mark is to be found even on the work of Hegel. In 1773 he completed his great prose epic, *Jacques the Fatalist*. Besides these important works, Diderot touched in some miniatures with true art. *My Father and I* (probably about 1760), *He and I* (1762), *Lament for my Old Dressing-Gown* (1774), *This is not a Story* (certainly about 1773) *Conversation between a Father and his Children* (also about 1773). In the line of light verse, we have also to mention the *Code Denis* (1770), and *Denis, the Twelfth night King* (1771).

Keeping up his interest not only in the theory of drama but in the theatre itself, and the actor's art in particular, Diderot wrote in 1773 his *Paradox of the Comedian*, which is real to this day.

The theory of art, and especially of the plastic arts, attracted Diderot as much as literature. Already, in 1751, he had published *Philosophic Inquiries into the Origin and Nature of the Beautiful*, which was, however, insufficiently mature. About 1759 he began to trace systematically the development of painting and sculpture, to study the "salons" more and more minutely, and to make critical analyses.

The *Salons* of 1759, 1761, 1763, 1765, 1767, 1769, 1771, which were published in Grimm's *Correspondence*, are well known, and so are those of 1775 and 1781. The *Essay on Painting*, an original theoretical work, is in a sense a supplement to the *Salon* of 1765.

From the "fine arts" to the "mechanic arts", or in other words, from art to craft, the distance seems considerable. Diderot traversed it easily. True, he is not known to have written any important work on the "crafts" or on technique, but we must not forget what tremendous work he undertook in this department too, in connection with the engravings which make up eleven volumes of the Encyclopaedia. Quite half of these volumes consist of drawings and designs; the most diverse processes are represented among them, and every technique known to his age. In fact, these pictures may be regarded as a unique document, giving us the most direct knowledge of technique as it stood on the eve of the industrial revolution.

Diderot played a tremendous part in the production of these pictures. He made himself responsible for the article of Crafts in which he described the methods of reproduction. He visited the studios of artisans and craftsmen. He studied their tools, questioned the workers, made them demonstrate their processes in front of him; took their place and did their work for them. He attached himself to the designers and technicians who traced the diagrams and designs for instruments.

Thus, incidentally as it were, Diderot discovered the working class and made public opinion discover it. In one of his articles in the Encyclopaedia he concludes the description of a wage-earner's work with-

"If the wage-earner is wretched, then so is the nation."

In these activities and literary labours Diderot spent his life until 1773, when, sixty years old, he undertook the long journey to Russia.

5. Diderot and Catherine II

It is well known that Catherine wanted to use the Encyclopaedists as the instruments of her policy. From the beginning of her reign the "Semiramis of the North" advertised to foreigners, and especially to the French "Republic of Letters", her intellectual liberalism and her interest in the thought of the century.

Her internal policy, the horrors of serfdom, the barbaric Asiatic despotism and tyranny, unchecked and uncontrolled, of the Russian aristocracy, remained very largely unknown to the liberal theorists of the French bourgeoisie. On the other hand, the fictitious "spirit of toleration" which ruled in the Empire of the Tsars was complacently pointed out to them; the "enlightenment" of Russian autocracy was stressed; much publicity was given to the Instruction to the Commission Appointed to Draw up a New Code of Laws, about which Catherine shamelessly plagued Montesquieu and Beccaria. Moreover, the middle-class intellectuals of France received flattering offers from the far North-East. D'Alembert had the prospect of being tutor to the Prince; Diderot, of publishing the *Encyclopaedia*. To Voltaire - secretly, it is true - the suggestion was made that he should write *The Age of Catherine - II*. They were nominated as members of the Academy of Science and the Academy of Art; they looked forward to pensions, according to the custom of the age. Diderot benefited by this policy, though not by his own seeking.

Catherine heard that the ageing philosopher was anxious to find a marriage dowry for his daughter, and was thinking of selling his library; through the double medium of her ambassador, Galiatzin, and of Grimm;

she offered to buy it from him. Diderot agreed, and the sale took place in 1765, bringing him in 15,000 francs. The better to emphasize her disinterestedness, Catherine allowed him the use of the books for his lifetime, and the title of her librarian, with an annual allowance of 1,000 francs.

It seems, however - it may have been intentional - that the allowance was only paid for eighteen months. But Diderot made no complaint, and when Galiatzin asked him one day whether he was receiving the agreed sum regularly, he answered that he thought it happiness enough that the empress, who had bought his stock, left him in possession of his tools. Catherine then decided to astonish the "Republic of Letters" by a new act of generosity and "magnanimity." She granted her "librarian", who was then fifty years old, the sum of 50,000 francs in advance for fifty years of service. So ended this episode, famous in certain circles in its time, of the Czarina's purchase of the philosopher's library. As for the library itself, after Diderot's death in 1785, it was to be sent to Petersburg, along with the fair copy of his manuscripts, by the services of his daughter and, or Naigeon.

Diderot felt that he was under an obligation to Catherine, and rendered her several services; thus, with his exceptional discrimination on matters of art, he advised her to acquire various contemporary French paintings. Similarly, he made a collection for her of the classic pieces of the sixteenth and the seventeenth century.

It may be said that the first collections of the Hermitage are due to his taste and initiative. Again, it was he who recommended his friend Falconet, the sculptor to Catherine, to make the "copper cavalier", the monument to Peter the First. The artist settled in Petersburg from that time to the end of 1765.

Diderot's personal recommendations did not always find favour with the empress. For instance, Mercier de la Riviere, the economist,

made a journey to Russia on his urgent advice, which proved to be a terrible fiasco. De la Riviere set out too impetuously to achieve his end-the changing of feudal Russia into a bourgeois country. He very soon had to leave that inhospitable state. He came to the home or serfdom with intent to preach the creation of a class of independent intellectuals, and even of free workers, owners of themselves and the produce of their toil.

More hospitality was shown to Diderot himself. He had a long standing invitation to Russia, and felt morally bound to give his personal thanks to the new owner of his library. The journey, however, was impossible so long as the editing of the *Encyclopaedia* remained unfinished. He did not carry out his wish till 1773.

Reflecting on the unforeseen disasters which so long a journey might bring, Diderot, who was now sixty, made his will before starting and made Naigeon his executor.

In May 1773, he left Paris for Saint-Petersburg, by way of Holland. He stayed for a while at the Hague with his old acquaintance Prince Galitzin, who had been Russian ambassador in Paris and was now filling the same office in the Netherlands, and was engaged in editing a posthumous edition of Helvetius' work *On Man*.

Diderot disagreed with Helvetius on many points which, though matters of detail, were none the less of real importance, and he set to work to refute the theories of his dead friend. He did not finish his observations till he came back.

He left the Hague in August, after letting the best months for travelling go by, and did not reach Saint-Petersburg until September 28th.

By all appearances, the visit passed off perfectly; the air was full of consideration, even of intimacy. Diderot only had official audiences with the empress on two or three occasions. Instead of such ceremonial :

"On the contrary, the Queen's door is open to me every day, from three in the afternoon to five or sometimes six. I go in : I am invited to sit down, and I chat away with as much freedom as you yourself allow me."

"The soul of Brutus with the charm of Cleopatra", is Diderot's description of Catherine.

Indeed, Diderot was his real self in these conversations. He talked of anything he liked with the same freedom as in the Paris salons, where he used to develop his theories in his friend d'Holbach's circle. His journal bears witness to this, for in it, writing actually in St. Petersburg, he recorded the conversations, and presented it to the empress just before he went home.

But it would be inaccurate to conclude that Catherine likewise behaved in his presence with the same naturalness and freedom. Diderot might come to her with a frank mind, but she, on the contrary, retained her mask of lies and hypocrisy throughout their conversations. Cleverly, in the presence of the philosopher, she played the part of the good ruler, kind and charitable.

Diderot literally plagued her with questions on the most varied aspects of life in Russia. He wanted to know about the number of the population and how it was composed; he was interested in the nobles, the clergy, the *odnodvorzi* or free peasants, as much as in the position of the Jews or the monks and nuns. He asked about the modes of agriculture, about the trade in bread, wine, butter, tar-water, black cattle etc. It seemed that there was no question of the national economy which the "Philosopher" neglected.

Catherine answered.... but what answers! When Diderot asked her to explain.

"... 'the relations between masters and slaves in cultivating the soil', she answered 'There are no established rules between masters and their subjects;

but every master of common-sense will consider cow, and milk her comfortably, without overtiring her. When a matter is not controlled by law, the law of nature immediately steps in; and often things are none the worse in that condition, since at least they are arranged naturally, according to the real facts of the case'."

In this lying tale, the reference to "the law of nature" is especially significant. It is well known that abstract ideas of natural rights" are used with equal success to justify radical or reactionary conclusions. How surprised Diderot must have been, when he heard Catherine interpret this same "natural law" in favour of slavery, when to the philosophers of the "enlightenment" the necessity and truth of it had appeared to be the justification of their struggle against feudalism in its foundations and all its survivals.

In her answers, almost always both too general and too confused, the empress displayed her ignorance of her own legislation. Sometimes they turn into eager defence, without the slightest proof. Sometimes, when a fair answer is impossible, they degenerate into bad jokes. For instance, when Diderot asked if there were any veterinary schools in Russia, Catherine's only answer was : "God save us from them!" One may doubt whether Diderot received such an evasion with a pleasant smile.

All the same, he took occasion to say all that he thought, without the slightest rudeness. In the most friendly language, with many personal compliments, he pointed out all the drawbacks of an autocratic regime. He advised the empress to summon the representatives of the people, and to hand over the legislative power to them. Much more, he recommended that they should be given the right to choose the czarina's successor; he favoured the constitution of a "Third Estate", enjoying equality before the law, and along with it the enfranchisement of the peasants. He expounded his anti-clerical and anti-religious ideas and so forth.

Obviously, all this was as far from the imperial policy or purposes as heaven from earth. Though Catherine wrote to Voltaire that Diderot was "a very remarkable intellect", and that "his equal is not to be met with every day", in practice she violently opposed all her guest's theories.

Two of her opinions about Diderot have come down to us, in which she shows her real face. After the philosopher's death she wrote to Grimm:

"In the catalogue of Diderot's library I have found a note-book entitled: 'Remarks on the instructions of H.M.E. to the deputies for the framing of laws'. This is a piece of sheer nonsense, in which there is neither prudence, insight, nor sense of realities. If my instructions had been to Diderot's taste, they would have been enough to turn everything upside down."

With the same frankness, she told the Comte de Segur in 1787.

"I had many long talks with him, but more out of curiosity than with profit. Had I only paid attention, my whole empire would have been turned upside down; I should have had to suppress the law, the administration, the finance, the policy everything and replace them by fantastic theories."

Evidently the Czarina, ruler of a State of slavery, thought the theories of the bourgeois revolution, which were Diderot's, "fantastic." In spite of the legend created by historians devoted to the throne, Diderot's ideas, the ideas of the bourgeois revolution in its youth, were abhorrent to the empress of a state which was founded on feudalism. Ultimately, this could not pass unnoticed by Diderot himself : he noted quietly;

"The philosopher and the sovereign see with very different eyes."

When subjects for discussion began to be exhausted, when the divergence of view between sovereign and philosopher became clearer and clearer, they had the tact to part without waiting for a violent break. Diderot prepared to go home : Catherine paid the expenses of his journey, offered him a coach, as well as money for his return, and presented him with her miniature.

Diderot left St. Petersburg at the beginning of March, 1774. The thaw has already set in when he was crossing the Dwina ; the ice sank under the weight of the coach, and the travellers only just missed being engulfed in a watery grave. Diderot related the adventure in a poem : *Crossing the Dwina on Ice*.

On the return journey he stayed with Gailitzin at The Hague once again. There he finished his refutation of the treatise *On Man*, collected materials for a work on Holland, started on another, of great importance, on physiology, and, on Catherine's request, supervised the publication of a "plan" and rules for various scientific institutions. Setting out from the Hague in September, he did not reach Paris again until October 1774. He had been absent a year and a half.

He had aged considerably, and his back was bent. Many of his friends were no more, others were passing away under his eyes. Helvetius had died in 1772. During his travels, there died an "arisan" of the "age of enlightenment", a protector of Diderot, Louis XV. Soon it was the turn of Voltaire and Rousseau, who vanished in the same year, 1778. Madame Geoffrin and Mlle de Lespinasse were gone, the doors of their salons were shut. D'Alembert too was dead. Diderot's own hour was coming near.

Nevertheless, the old man went on working. With all the eagerness of youth, he surrendered to the charm of Seneca's personality and life, and decided to write a defence of him. He devoted fourteen hours a day to the careful reading of his works, and the study of works devoted to him. Thus, in 1778, appeared the *Essay on the Reigns of Claudius and Nero, and on the Life of Seneca*. In 1782 Diderot gave it a second edition.

On February 19th, 1784, he began to spit blood. The end was drawing near. The doctors agreed that one lung was waterlogged. On top of that, he had a paralytic stroke. But as soon as his health showed the

least improvement he started on long discussions of classical poetry, and translated Horace and Virgil.

Hearing that Diderot was ill, the parish priest began paying him visit after visit. His aim was to induce the sick man to deny his materialist theories and his atheism. This is a familiar device of the clergy, who, to tell the truth, very often go away victorious. The dying "free thinker" whose strength is failing and who is undergoing pressure from those around him, confesses his "sins" and dies reconciled with the Church. Such events invariably become a potent instrument of propaganda in the hands of the clergy.

The ecclesiastics were plotting a similar descent on Diderot; the dying materialist atheist is too tempting as an object for conversion. Diderot, for his part, gave a worthy welcome to the worthy priest, who did not hide his intentions : he spoke of the good works which he had achieved, and reminded him of those yet to be done.

One day, it seemed that the two in their discussions had reached an agreement on some moral questions, concerning humanity and good deeds. The priest hinted that if Diderot would print what he had said, and add to it a little retraction of his former works, it would have a very great effect on the world.

"I'm sure it would, sir," answered the philosopher, "but you must agree that I should be guilty of a bare faced lie."

Thus the manoeuvre was frustrated.

Madame de Vandeuil also tells how some of the sick man's friends met at his house the day before his death. Conversation had turned on the roads which lead to philosophy. Diderot said : "The first step to philosophy is unbelief."

The next morning, July 31st 1784, Diderot was still talking with his doctor, but when everyone sat down to table and his wife said a word to the sick man, he made no answer. Diderot was dead.

6. Diderot's Character and Personality

The foregoing account enables us to form an idea of Diderot's character. Integrity and spontaneity, modesty and simplicity, sweetness and charm are the keynotes of his personality.

Marmontel said of him in his Memoirs :

"Who knows Diderot only in his writings has never known him.... His whole soul was in his eyes and lips. Never has face portrayed more perfectly the goodness of the heart."

Friendly discussion was, so to speak, the state of nature for Diderot. This quotation from Marmontel alludes to it. Morellat, another contemporary, also wrote.

"Diderot's conversation..... had great charm ; his talk was alive with complete sincerity, varied in its forms, brilliant in imagery, fruitful in ideas and a stimulus to the ideas of others."

In his life as in his talk, Diderot was never commonplace.

His liveliness, the variety of his impressions, states of mind and reactions, harmonised with the great range of expression of his face. He knew this himself. Referring to his portrait, executed by Van Loo, one of the most distinguished artists of the age, he wrote.

"My children, I warn you that this is not myself. In one day, I have a hundred different faces according to the things that move me. I was calm, melancholy, dreamy, tender, violent, passionate, enthusiastic : but I was never as you see me there. I had a large forehead, very lively eyes, well marked features, a head just like that of some ancient orator, a good-humour which bordered on vulgarity, on the rude simplicity of the ancients."

The portrait he liked best was by Garand.

"I have never been well done except by a poor devil named Garand, who hit me off, as a fool sometimes lights on an epigram. If you see my portrait by Garand, you see me. Eccoil vero Pulcinella."

And yet, paradoxical as it may seem, this simple, spontaneous man who felt at home everywhere, was neither at ease nor simple nor spontaneous in his own home. Diderot was not happy in his private and family life. Without passing any moral verdict, we must record some historical facts.

His youthful feeling for Antoinette Champion very quickly disappeared. Diderot's companion proved to be inferior to him not only in mental development but in good breeding. She was a good woman by nature, but her horizon was limited to lower middle-class interests, without intellectual curiosity; she could not get on with Diderot.

In private life Diderot was no aristocrat. On his friend d'Holbach's estate, he loved to talk with the gardener and with the peasants from the neighbouring villages. He said he always learnt something from these discussions. We know, too, how he would hang about the workshops and converse with the craftsmen. On the other hand, he declared that he was capable of saying anything on any subject, except "Good-day". In 1768, when some influential German prince happened to pass through Paris, Grimm made an effort to arrange a meeting between the distinguished man and Diderot. But the latter refused point-blank, because he found these 'ridiculous parades' intolerable. It was not because he thought too much of himself and scorned the prosaic figure of his wife that Diderot was out of sympathy with her. The deeper reason of this misunderstanding lies elsewhere.

It turned out that he could stand neither the tinsel aristocracy nor the narrow view of life of the lower middle-class, which, his wife insisted,

should be the rule at home. That was why he fled in his free time, and chose to spend his leisure at d'Holbach's, at Helvetius', at anybody's fireside rather than his own.

Another matter of importance in his private life was his long intimacy with Sophie Volland. It was formed after 1750, when Diderot was past his fortieth year and Mlle Volland was not far from hers. To this relationship, which lasted for years, we owe the legacy of Diderot's correspondence. There must be more than 550 of the philosopher's letters in existence; but unfortunately the collection to which we have access, which contains 187, is very incomplete. It is enough to say that the twelfth letter, dated June 4th 1759, is really the hundred - and - thirty eight. This epistolary intercourse went on not only when the correspondents were far apart (which, indeed, was not very often), but even when they were both in Paris.

The four last letters which have come down to us date from 1774. Though we do not know the reason of the break, we know that both correspondents survived it for ten years. Sophie Volland died on February 22nd 1784, and her friend died five months later.

This monumental pile of letters counts among the most important lights on the age. Through it we catch glimpses of the public and literary activity and the private life of a writer who was one of the most brilliant representatives of the "Republic of Letters." The manners of the age are set down in it.

For their revelation of their author's personality, his life, his states of mind, in a word, of his very self, these letters perhaps deserve the first, place in a collection of literary documents of the kind. They may be compared to those which Abelard wrote to Heloise, or Tchaikowski to Von Meck. In their form, and as specimens of his style, they are a natural and necessary supplement to Diderot's literary heritage.

We have seen how his time was passed in Paris, divided between the work of the Encyclopaedia and the friendly discussions in the salons. The letters to Sophie Volland give us information about his leisure hours.

Every year, from the autumn of 1759, Diderot went away for early six weeks to Grandval, his friend d'Holbach's place. A large part of the collection consists of letters sent from there. To speak accurately, it is impossible to say that he was having a rest while he was there. He was never idle. A room was kept for him on the second floor, looking out on the forest. Up early, at six in the morning, after a very hot cup of tea, he would settle down in front of a portrait of Horace to read and write. The same work was going on in the next rooms, the abode of the "infernal workshop" of d'Holbach and Naigeon, who after 1760 were writing atheistical pamphlets "by sheafs."

Thus filled, the time slipped by till two o'clock. At that hour the whole company, d'Holbach's family and his guests, assembled at a table. Dinner over, Diderot went for a walk in the garden, and invariably had a chat with the workmen, or else they all went off to the forest. They came back home at about seven in the evening, and while waiting for supper, chatted or played piquet. After supper, at about halfpast eleven, they would return each to his room. It was time for bed.

One day, on the request of Catherine-II, Diderot described for her his method of work. Perhaps some new idea had occurred to his mind; he asked himself first of all, whether there was anyone more competent than he to investigate it. If the answer was yes, he rejected the plan of work without another thought. Only if the decision went the other way would he settle down to meditate on his chosen subject.

"When I have chosen my line, I think it over at home by day and night, in company, in the streets, in my walks, my task pursues me everywhere."

On my desk I keep a large sheet of paper, on which I jot down a note of my thoughts, without arrangement, chaotically, just as they come.

When my mind is tired I rest, I give my thoughts time to grow again; this is what I call my 'pollarding' - a metaphor borrowed from one of the labours of the countryside.

This done, I pick up again those notes of chaotic and desultory thoughts, and put them down in order, some times numbering them. When I have reached that point, I say my work is done.

I write straight off; my mind warms to the rest of the task in writing.

If some new idea occurs to me which has a place elsewhere, I put it on a separate sheet of paper.

I rarely re-write, and the several small pamphlets which your Majesty is holding have only been written once; they are left with all the carelessness and light inaccuracies of haste.

Only when my work is done I read what others have thought about my subject.

If in reading I am convinced of error, I destroy my work.

If I find anything in my authors which suits me, I make use of it.

If they inspire me with a new idea, I insert it in the margin, for as I am lazy about copying I always leave a big margin.

Then is the time to consult my friends, the impartial public, and even my enemies."

In this passage Diderot describes with great exactness the peculiarities of his mode of work. Setting aside some of his stories and novels, which by their nature call for a continuous and, so to speak, systematic unfolding of their subject, all his theoretical and critical works bear traces of this method of creation.

The style of an academic thesis, or of an essay of the Kantian type, is entirely foreign to him, "I do not like sheer systematic thought on

serious subjects." His own style is that of scattered thoughts. In this way he composed the *Thoughts of a Philosopher*, and later the *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature*, the *Detached Thoughts of Painting*, and the witty *Principles of the Policy of Rulers*.

Indeed, Diderot had no ambition to put his ideas into systematic form. Though they are made so effortlessly clear, it is not easy to set them in order or to follow their interconnections.

A whole series of his works, essential for the clear understanding of his doctrines, suffers from this fragmentariness. The directing thread of his own writings is borrowed from the labours of other authors. Diderot's thought takes shape by opposition to that of others. He subjects a book to his critical analysis, and in doing so makes his own ideas clear in a positive form. In this way he wrote the Refutation following the work of Helvetius and the Elements of Physiology, which are simply reader's notes relating to a book by von Haller. Similarly, his expositions of painting have the appearance of reactions. On the same lines he wrote the Salons, which, besides their critical analysis of the Paris Salons, supply precious gifts to anyone who wants to understand the French art of the age and Diderot's aesthetic theories.

One of his favourite modes of expression is the "letter". Such is the Letter to the Blind, for the Use of Those Who see, and the Letter on the Deaf and Dumb, for the use of Those Who Hear and Speak, not counting his correspondence, in the real sense, with Sophie Volland or again with Falconet. The latter contains some reflections on the importance to a painter of the appreciation of posterity.

This literary form, so full of life and grace, is remarkable in the history of literature. Its perfection of style, however, is only achieved in the "dialogues" so dear to their author. Voltaire said that Diderot was born for monologue far more than for dialogue. All the same, he excels in philo-

sophic dialogue. He chose this mode of expression for his most famous masterpieces : Rameau's Nephew, a portrait of the age and a picture of manners; the original treatise on aesthetics, *The Paradox of the Comedian*, which is a sketch for a theory of scenic art; the dialogue between the lay friar and Orou the savage in the *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage*, which contains an exceedingly witty discussion of theological subjects. There is dialogue even in some of his strictly philosophical work; in the *Discussion between D'Alembert and Diderot*, in *D'Alembert's Dream*, and in the *Sequel to the Discussion*.

With little care for pedantic consistency, or even for the arrangement of his teeming ideas, Diderot was altogether careless of his literary "property" also; no one could reproach him with excess of self-regard.

A number of his works, and those not mere rough draughts or outlines, never saw the light till after his death. It is enough to cite the posthumous publication of *Rameau's Nephew*, which first appeared in Germany, in a translation by Goethe. The first French edition was retranslated from the German.

Still more; for the writers who were his friends, Diderot was a genuine "universal provider" of ideas and the development of ideas. His part in Rousseau's first *Discourse* is beyond controversy. The pages which the second *Discourse On the Origin of Inequality* owes to his pen, have been settled with certainty. It is possible that, as a young man he had a more or less direct share in touching up the first works of Condillac. Without any doubt the last chapter of d'Holbach's *System of Nature* was recast by Diderot. Numerous signs prove that he collaborated in Raynal's *History of the East and West Indies*, etc. In general, he would suggest the idea for a book to one, develop the subject for another, correct the style of a third, while for some he went so far as to re-write whole pages.

There is a significant story told by his daughter; a mere tale, but it has a ring of authenticity.

"One morning," says Madame de Vandeul, a youth arrived with a manuscript; he asked my father if he would please read it and put his comments on the margin; it was a bitter satire against himself and his works. The youth returned. 'Sir', my father said to him, 'I don't know you at all, I have never done you an ill turn: will you explain to me the motive that caused you to make me read a satire for the first time in my life? As a rule I throw such compositions into my waste paper basket' 'I have nothing to eat : I was hoping that you would give me some money not to print it.' 'You wouldn't be the first author whom people would cheerfully pay to keep quiet ; but you can do better than that with this effusion. The Duke of Orleans' brother is living in retirement at Saint-Genevieve; he is a godly man, and detests me. Dedicate your satire to him; have it bound in his coat-of-arms; bring him the book one morning, and you will get a subsidy for it'. 'But I don't know the prince, and I find it difficult to compose the dedicatory letter' 'Sit down, and I will do it for you'. My father wrote the letter; the author took it away, went to see the prince, received twenty-five louis for it, and came back some days later to thank my father, who gently advised him to choose a less degrading line of work."

It would be entirely wrong, however, to conclude from all that has been said that Diderot was a scatter-brained theorist, a mind of the beaten track, a trifle with ideas. He did not throw his mental endowments to the winds, nor was he a dreamer who lacked will or muscle, could not make use of a weapon, or was incapable of setting his "literary house" in order. The originator, organiser, effective chief of the Encyclopaedia could not be that kind of man; nor was he. Surely it took uncommon synthetic power to work out, single-handed, the Summary and the whole scheme of this undertaking, to grasp it without quailing, actually to go through the work as a whole and in the least of its details, to supervise a real company of writers and artists, and in the course of more than twenty years to fill twenty-eight volumes with their articles and drawings.

Diderot sacrificed his personal literary interests to this collective undertaking of the Encyclopaedia, by superhuman and unremitting toil. On account of it, more than once, he put off the definite launching of his writings and the publication of his own work. For more than a quarter of a century it stood between him and his original literary activity. And in spite of that, it does not show the least trace of the spirit of scholastic formality, it is by no means a rigid framework. It bears witness to a universal conception of knowledge, a conception of the universe, in the true sense of the word. In it the most varied elements are combined, in a unique and coherent system of thought.

CHAPTER - II

FROM THEISM TO ATHEISM

"Unbelief is the first step to philosophy" - Diderot.

1. Diderot's Transformation of Philosophy

In his Encyclopaedia, going back to Wolf's formula, Diderot defines philosophy as "The science of possibilities, considered as possibilities"; as the science of adequate causes. Possibilities cannot all be realised at the same time. Certain causes determine that this possibility shall be realised before that one. Philosophy tries to grasp these determining causes.

In so far as man both knows and desires, knowledge is divided into theoretical or metaphysical philosophy, and practical philosophy. The former in turn separates into three branches, each one corresponding to one of the special objects of metaphysics.

The object of natural theology is God. It is a science of the possibilities relating to God, a science of the essential being, considered in itself. Positive theology, based on the principle of the supernatural, and on revelation, is not a part of philosophy but of the study of religion. That branch of metaphysics of which the object is the Soul is called rational psychology. Lastly, rational physics or cosmology is the science of possibilities relating to bodies, and its object is Matter.

Corresponding to each of these branches of speculative philosophy there is a branch of practical philosophy. Religious worship is derived from

theology, the science of the soul requires ethics, and the science of bodies requires politics.

The reader who knows anything, no matter how little, of Diderot's life, will no doubt be surprised to see such a thinker suddenly imprisoned in metaphysics (taking the word here in its derogatory sense); imprisoned in that dreary theorising against which he struggled from his early youth. It may seem even more strange that he should be entangled in it at the very moment when there was an opportunity offered to him of sketching out the definition and the classification, the objects and the problems, of the science he preferred. In 1745, in his preface to his translation of Shaftesbury's *Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit* (Essay on Merit and Virtue) he had already pronounced a shattering criticism on the philosophy of this school, with its "subtle matter" and its vortices, its universals and its categories, its entia and quidditates; in a word, he had emphatically rejected not only scholastic philosophy, but also Cartesianism, which was a survival of scholasticism.

Suddenly, in a volume of the *Encyclopaedia* which he was preparing for the press after the year 1757, we see him going back to the Cartesian substances, and to an interpretation of metaphysics which agrees not only in spirit but even to the letter with Wolfian philosophy. Diderot, who even at that time had definitely emancipated himself from God, and rightly put him in a place in the faculties of theology, "the best schools of unbelief," in his own phrase; Diderot, who refused to consider the soul as a substance and reduced it to the status of a mode or accident of matter, proceeds to recognise the rights of rational psychology and theology in the city of philosophy.

Illogical if you like, but the underlying causes of the illogicality must be found. Diderot, as we know, was more discreet in his articles in the *Encyclopaedia* than in his anonymous works, not to mention those which

were not meant for publication. At the time when the series of volumes VIII to XVII came out, the *Encyclopaedia* had already survived two serious crises in which its existence was at stake. Diderot took this into account, and took care not to express the whole of his views in its pages. Moreover the purpose of the dictionary was to present a general picture of knowledge in its existing condition. It was therefore impossible to keep silence on what was taking place. Now the tendencies of Wolf's philosophy were spreading quickly in Germany and dominating the German universities. Wolf himself only died in 1754. The only matter for surprise to see Diderot not only conversant with English philosophy, which was contemporary, but with German philosophy which was just then being born.

The text must be regarded quite simply as an article in an encyclopaedic dictionary written in the middle of the eighteenth century. One further question must interest us : did Diderot himself accept the threefold division of philosophy proposed by Wolf? Did he ascribe any importance to the lifeless forms, the purely formal and logical content, of the rational theology, psychology and cosmology, which the "sage of Koenigsberg," twenty years later, was to criticise in his *Transcendental Dialectic*? The answer is not to be found in the article cited, nor even in the *Encyclopaedia*, but pervading the whole of Diderot's works. The secret of the problem is contained in his "thoughts", "dialogues", "letters", in the marginal notes left in the books in his library, in his allegorical stories and his "sequels" to the works of other writers.

Bit by bit, in different years and on various occasions, Diderot worked out his philosophy - the philosophy of a revolutionary class in a pre-revolutionary age; taking his stand on the data of contemporary science, but foreseeing the success of the science of the future. He hardly troubled about consistency. He left to future seekers the task of chopping his philosophy into paragraphs, re-assembling it in chapters, giving it form.

Before we attempt such an undertaking, let us see what fate Diderot reserved for the edifice Wolfian philosophy. He started with a hesitant criticism of positive theology, of Christianity; he transferred this criticism to the plane of natural theology; he ended by not allowing to God the "possibility" even of existence. In this way he ceased to regard rational theology as a department of philosophy. Thanks to experimental data, he killed its companion, rational psychology; he disentangled from it the theory of knowledge, and turned in into experimental psychology. Breaking the artificial tie which linked ethics with the "science of the soul", he rescued ethics from all religious domination, set up a lay ethic for his own age, and set it on a foundation not of Christianity, theism, or even deism, but of "human nature properly understood". He widened the field of the "science of bodies" by replacing rational cosmology by experimental philosophy, or in the language common to his own generation and the nineteenth century, natural philosophy. He laid the foundation stone of aesthetic criticism, and further, of aesthetic philosophy. The reader will see for himself how much of Wolfe's classification is left. In the following chapters we shall examine these main divisions of philosophy, as Diderot understood them.

2. The Theme of the Essay on Merit and Virtue

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when all Diderot's contemporaries who had been the witnesses of his creative activity for 35 years had vanished from the scene, and historians had not yet come to take their place, the public discovered with astonishment how many contradictions were concealed in the philosopher's work. It was only necessary to face one book with another to see two different conceptions of the same subject. It is therefore not surprising that Diderot acquired the reputation of a writer full of paradox and inconsistency, who was swayed by the impulse of the moment. What is more, to this day references are heard to his "pendulum swings", and to the "chameleon-like" variability of his genius. But such judgments sound like anachronisms. Since the middle of last century the work of such men as Damiron in France and Rosenkrantz in Germany has revealed the deep-seated logic in Diderot's development. Some, it is true, represent it as a somewhat broken line, which recoils suddenly upon itself. We shall return later to this subject. For the moment let us grasp the fact itself; that instead of pure and simple contradictions, a continuity in his thought has begun to gain recognition.

In fact, careful study of his early works proves the extent to which his thought kept on moving in the same direction, while it veered more and more to the left. As Naigeon said, his thought was purged of all the grounds of prejudice. If we follow closely the political and economic history of France during this period, we shall see that the road traversed by Diderot the theorist merged with that of the Third Estate in its evolution. His first writings were in the period of war abroad, the ruin of the people, the growth of

taxation at home, and an intensive recruiting campaign for the army and the police force, which in November and December 1743 was absorbing the whole artisan class, with the exception of personal servants. It was also a time when the clergy were raging against the people, when religious convictions met with more repression than ever, (those who opposed the Unigenitus Bull were excommunicated), and when the court and the aristocracy were redoubling their luxury and extravagance. The Third Estate in this first half of the century was not yet politically conscious, but its conscience was roused by the violence of the religious controversies.

Religious questions focussed the attention of the general public, gave them a habit of free inquiry, tended to put the foundations of the State through a corrosive criticism. Diderot in his own development was in the front rank of the Third Estate; its impulses came to him from the reality which was his native air; he drew his strength from it, expressed and justified the aims and efforts of the mass, fired himself with enthusiasm and communicated the fire to others. A philosopher of philosophers, his very nature and the cast of his mind made him pick up their scattered thoughts and give them brilliant expression. That was what the language of the eighteenth century meant by a "philosopher". He was an old pupil of the Jesuits, and the product of a family without a great deal of culture; he began therefore by criticizing his own religious beliefs and those of others.

A youth who has just left school has open ears for metaphysical subtleties. He is encumbered with learning of a theoretical kind, useless for real life. He is lacking in sophistication and the "science of behaviour". Nevertheless, in the big world he is welcomed, surrounded, and drawn from the straight and narrow path by atheists, deists, Socinians, Spinozists and all sorts of "heretics". He is bound, therefore, to concern himself with ethics and its science of the common good. So it was that Diderot set

about his first original work in 1745; an adaptation of the Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit of the English "free thinker", Shaftesbury. In the preface, he set out to prove that virtue, which is the spring of human life, is almost inextricably bound up with the knowledge of God, and that the earthly and temporal happiness of man is inseparable from virtue.

"No religion, no virtue; no virtue, no happiness."

But even at that stage it was not possible to give a rigid interpretation to this aphorism of faith. The end of man is happiness - never mind, for the moment, whether he pursues temporal happiness or eternal. This end is unattainable without virtue, and the condition of virtue is faith in God. But is religion itself possible without virtue? Diderot did not ask the question: nevertheless, he thought about it. The relationship is one of mutual dependence : if there is no virtue without faith, there can be no faith without virtue. If believers are not good men, they must be bad believers; their faith is a matter of words, not of action. Or else their idea of God is a false one and requires to be reformed. Diderot was not an enemy of religion, provided that religion was rightly interpreted.

"Religion, rightly interpreted and practised with enlightened zeal, cannot fail to exalt the moral virtues. It is even in alliance with natural understanding; and when it is well founded, the progress of the latter does not make it nervous for its rights. Difficult as it may be to see the boundaries between the domain of faith and that of reason, the philosopher does not confuse their respective objects... he feels affection and respect for both. It is as far from philosophy to irreligion as from religion to fanaticism; but from fanaticism to barbarism is but a single step."

The barbarian fanatic knows only the "spectre" of religion".

".....The worst that unbelief can do is less menacing than this inquisition. Unbelief strives to refute the evidences of religion; the inquisition tends to annihilate them... Remember the history of our civil discord; you will see half

the nation bathing in the blood of the other half, in the name of piety, and violating the elemental feelings of humanity to uphold the cause of God; as if he alone could claim to be religious who laid aside the nature of man."

Thus, in dedicating his translation, Diderot addressed his brother, the Canon of Langres Cathedral.

Diderot broke with official Catholicism, and the break was precipitated by the religious history of his time. Fanatics and bigots, princes and followers of the Church, were more abhorrent to him in their fanaticism than the sceptics in their lack of faith. For the road from fanaticism to barbarism is quickly covered; nothing haunts it but the spectre of religion. But religion must needs be saved, since without it there is neither virtue, nor, consequently, happiness. Belief in God had to be delivered from the prejudices with which fanatics had weighed it down; it had to be brought into harmony with human science, and the spirit of tolerance must pervade it. Setting out on this task, Diderot followed Shaftesbury, who often went further than he. But the first step was taken. Diderot was a Catholic no more.

He consented to ask of himself wherein virtue lay, what was the influence of religion upon right conduct, what were the limits of its salutary operation, and whether an atheist could be an upright man.

Did the superstitious and the fanatical call themselves Christians? Well, the name is unimportant. To Diderot, the main thing was to accept this convention without giving support to propositions which go against reason. He would accept nothing but that which squared with his conscience, that which summoned man to virtue, and justified the summons. In 1745, out of the whole of Christian dogma, he retained the existence of God, the reality of moral good and evil, the immortality of the soul, and the conception of reward and punishment in a life to come. But before accepting the dogmas of revealed religion he wanted to find direct proofs. Till he

found these proofs he rejected it; and that is the essence of his Theism. Deism, on the other hand, admits the reality of God, and of good and evil, but denies revealed religion. For the moment Diderot had not cleared this fence. Theism, indeed, was not Christianity, but it was necessary to begin with theism to become a genuine Christian and not a creature of bigotry, superstition and fanaticism. "The basis of all religion is theism." For this reason it is wrong to condemn it. In accepting this "common element" of religions, Diderot believed that he was drawing near to Christianity, he did not realise that by that very step he was moving from it.

Shaftesbury, and Diderot after him, admit that good and evil are realities, but both consider them as relative conceptions. Every being is defined by its contacts with the entire scheme of things; what is good for one may be evil for another. The spider devours the fly; for the spider and the whole spider species, that is undoubtedly a good thing. As undoubtedly, it is an evil from the fly's point of view; but the relative evil of the fly cannot become an absolute evil. It is the same with human affairs. A man in a fit of delirium cannot be called wicked for hitting someone; nor can a man be called virtuous who shuns crime for fear of punishment. Diderot adds :

"It is possible for a being to love himself, to work for his own interests and follow his temporal happiness without ceasing to be virtuous. The final achievement of human wisdom is the right kind of self-love and the right understanding of one's own interests and happiness."

The reader will see that in replacing absolute by relative ideas of good and evil Diderot did, in fact, "reject"? the conceptions of Christianity. While he waited for the rewards and punishments of a life to come, he set to work to amend the code by which men are judged, and by the principles of which, in consequence, their lives are controlled. He set aside the ascetic and solitary ideal whose champions went out into the wilder-

ness or the cavern in search of happiness, and proposed instead that men should conquer happiness here in the midst of their fellow-men. According to Shaftesbury, the hater of his kind who severed all ties with society of his own accord must be a spirit of darkness, misery and evil. Diderot, in a footnote, sought to restrict the scope of this statement, true only of men in a state of nature. But at the same time he contradicts himself by another remark. Considering the relativity of good and evil, Shaftesbury has confined the title of virtuous to the man :

"all whose feelings, all whose thoughts, all the the habits, in a word, of his mind and heart, harmonise with the common good of his species, of the system of created things, that is to say, wherein nature has established him and which is his starting point."

On this, Diderot makes the comment that the necessary aim of society is the good of the individual, and that this good is wholly unattainable without common agreement.

The monk and the ascetic are useless members of society. In Diderot's eyes they very soon become positively harmful members, In 1745 he was far from any final elaboration of his system. He held that the particular interest and personal happiness of each individual was inseparably bound up with the general welfare. Virtue consists in the pursuit of happiness by contributing to the happiness of others. Vice is the opposite attitude, and has unhappiness for its result. This was Shaftesbury's teaching to 17th century England, and Diderot's to the France of 1745. It was soon to be the teaching of Priestly and Helvetius.

On one side, then, religion is virtue's prop. Piety strengthens and completes it. Where piety is absent, virtue is imperfect and unstable. Men cannot achieve moral perfection without knowledge of the true God. Diderot was led to religion by moral considerations. Consequently it was necessary to admit that there were rewards and punishments beyond the grave;

otherwise, the whole system of the world to come would not endow virtue with a single privilege on this earth. How was he to replace his theism, his belief in a Supreme Being, by the hypothesis of a universal necessity governing all phenomena? This hypothesis held no place for a being or an object capable of inspiring love or hate, terror or admiration. Four or five years later, certainly, Diderot would have countered this objection by saying that it was simply an argument *ad hominem*. To acknowledge the law of necessity is not in the least to suppress one's hatred of priests and tyrants or one's admiration of talent. But Diderot the theist was satisfied with this purely rhetorical answer. In some notes to the translation he declares his preference for the Christian religion, and this preference is inspired by moral considerations alone.

On the other side, he realised that religion might be a force for good or evil, according as it was good or bad in itself. While atheism is liable to confuse the conceptions of justice and injustice, this confusion is in no way a distinguishing mark of atheism; all corrupt religions are guilty of it, including fanatical Christianity. If the Supreme Being is worshipped, merely because of his power to pardon and chastice, the object of such worship cannot conduce to righteousness. If this be so, it is not devoutness alone which matters, but also the nature of its object and of the man who feels it. Is Mr. X devout? That is not the question. Go on to tell me whether he is an upright man; if he is, I shall not even venture to ask you whether he is a bigot. Can righteousness be separated from faith? That was the problem which vexed Diderot in 1745 and perhaps even earlier. How could he assert that there was no virtue without faith in God, when facts proved that there were atheists who were not evildoers, who lived good lives without expecting a reward in the life to come, and without even believing in the life beyond the grave?

Experience of practical life showed Diderot that virtue, which he had put on a foundation of religious faith, was capable of standing by itself. Virtue could do without this dubious prop which he had presented to it. An atheist could be a virtuous man. This final declaration serves to carry us over logically to Diderot's next work, the *Thoughts of a Philosopher*.

3. Diderot's Deism in the 'Thoughts of a Philosopher', His Development. The Problem of Scepticism

These Thoughts, deliberately fragmentary and incoherent, were written down in three days. Clearly, however, they were not conceived by their author in so short a time; they are too clear-cut and well-considered. They are called forth by the atmosphere of his age, and also by his reflections on Montaigne, and especially, on Bayle.

Like Bayle, Diderot never expressed anything in direct form. He strewed his "pros" and "contras" profusely, and left the responsibility for judgment with the reader. But the conclusions which he suggested are less numerous than is generally believed. They can be reduced to two: deism on one side, atheism on the other. Inclining as he did to the former, he conscientiously presented the best arguments for the latter. In these Thoughts there was not much "philosophy" in the true sense. They were still theological, because for Diderot religion was still the most real of all problems.

He even expressed, quite seriously, a perfectly orthodox Thought

"I was born in the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church; and to the utmost of my power I submit myself to its judgment. I wish to die in the faith of my fathers, and I believe it to be a good faith, inasmuch as it is acceptable to those who have never had direct communion with the godhead, nor ever witnessed a miracle. That is my confession of faith". (par. 58)

How much of the "Roman Catholic Apostolic" faith was left to Diderot

is made clear by other fragments of the Thoughts, beginning with the opening of this same paragraph 58; in which he says he is not concerned to be a better Christian than Descartes, Montaigne, Locke and Bayle, and that if they are condemned by the devout, he will share their fate of his own free will.

In this book, that is to say in 1746, Diderot broke not only with orthodox Christianity, but even with theism. The evidences of Christianity are very strong, but "were they a thousand times stronger," they would appear no more convincing to him.

"Why demand of me that I should believe that there are three persons in God as firmly as I believe that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles? Every proof must produce a conviction in me in proportion to its strength; and demonstrations must have different effects on my mind in geometry, ethics, or physics." (par. 59)

To the man who dared to speak thus about the Trinity, miracles were not evidence. They would not be accepted in geometry or physics. Miracles have been seen only by those who wished to see them. Had he been assured that the whole Jewish nation had seen the Ten Commandments received from heaven, Diderot would not have believed it, because it was contrary to experience; just as he could not believe that the sun stood still in its course. In ancient times, according to a writer of "acknowledged impartiality", an abyss was closed, as the oracle foretold, the moment that a brave rider had hurled himself into it. This chronicler led us into an error, and the world has repeated the story after him (par. 46). What is the use of playing on our feelings with miracles? Give Diderot a logical syllogism, and he will be satisfied. But on that subject, no syllogism would convince him.

"What is God? It is a question which we ask children, and which philosophers are hardly able to answer... He (the child) learns at the same time, from

the same lips, that there are hobgoblins, ghosts, were-wolves, and a God."
(par. 25)

Diderot has now travelled a long way; Christian and pagan miracles are classed together, and the Christian God is put on a level with hobgoblins and ghosts.

On another side, it is also an advance to reject the solitude of the recluse, the pilgrim's prostrations and the mortification of the flesh. "Apostles" of these things have salvation promised to them; but it would be unjust to refuse salvation to a single human being. Must the whole of society turn into a world of Stylitae, following the example of Saint Simon? What a society it would be?

"Who condemns them to these torments? The God whom they have offended... And what is this God? A God of all goodness...." (par.7)

Topics such as these, which Diderot was discussing in 1746, were to grow and increase in the literature of the eighteenth century. Twenty-five years later they were to find ample space in d'Holbach's *System of Nature*.

In fact, "the age of revelations, marvels and special missions is ended." (par.41) The Holy Scriptures are not of divine origin. They are books made by man, selected and revised by human criticism (par.45). Were there not sixty evangelists in ancient times? Since then, fifty-six have been dropped; they contained too many puerilities. In the four survivors a certain amount are still left. "The foundations of belief are purely human". (Pa. 60). The reader will see how Diderot, in his explicit rejection of the dogma of revealed religion, takes formal leave of theism. Whither is he travelling - to complete unbelief? Not yet. For the time being he did not accept atheism, but he took one more step in that direction.

Superstition - and the orthodoxy of the church must be included under that heading - is "more harmful to God than atheism." Plutarch was right when he would rather

"have it thought that there had never been a Plutarch in the world, than that Plutarch was unjust, hot-tempered, changeful, jealous and vindictive" (par.12)

It must be admitted, however, that God is like this.

"There are people of whom it cannot be said that they fear God, but rather that they are frightened of Him."(par.8)

One of his many anonymous critics, probably some one of standing among the Catholic clergy, objected that if there were people who could be said to quake with terror before God, those very people were the philosophers. But Diderot anticipated the objection. The most pious creatures are afraid of God, when they think of him as a vengeful being. Sometimes, indeed, they account him merciful. But all this resembles "a fever which has its hot and cold fits." (par.11). An upright mind would rather that there was no such being than accept the current idea of him (par.9). The world would be a much more peaceful place if there were nothing to fear after death.

"We should not imagine God as either too wicked or too kind. Justice is a mean between the excesses of clemency and cruelty." (par.10)

Some of these Thoughts of a Philosopher have a ring of atheism about them. Sometimes, even, they are materialist. Those who accept this theory can say, in all fairness, "that there is no God; that the creation is a chimera", because "the eternity of matter is no more difficult than the eternity of mind." It is impossible to conceive how movement could have brought forth the universe, but "it is nonsense to remove this difficulty by supposing the existence of a being" whom it is even harder to conceive. If the order in nature is so wonderful that it reveals the presence of an intelligence,

"the disorder which holds sway in the moral world utterly refutes the existence of Providence... If all things are the work of a God, all things must be as perfect as possible."

If this is not so, it argues impotence or ill-will in God. What answer can be made to the atheist? That he is a criminal, and that he would not argue against the existence of God unless he had reason to fear him? The atheist will suggest that you had better leave this tirade to empty-headed orators, and will simply answer you :

"Jupiter, thou art angry; thou art wrong therefore." (par. 15) Theologians and metaphysicians assert that the universe could not be formed from an accidental concourse of atoms, elements of matter, in perpetual motion. But since the number of their combinations is indefinite it is possible in so great a multitude to have one combination which is the beginning of the universe.

"The hypothetical duration of chaos is more astounding to the mind than the actual birth of the universe." (par.21)

This bare synopsis of his ideas shows how Diderot laboured, slowly and stubbornly, to solve the problem of religion and philosophy. It shows that it would be both inaccurate and too exact to affix short labels to his work in the course of its development. These labels may be correct from a formal point of view. We ourselves distinguish between phases in the history of his thought. But it must always be borne in mind that his thought was not yet steady and fixed, that this particular problem was still unsolved by Diderot, and that in each of his early works he was continually deviating, now to the right, now to the left of a given mean. They are genuine reconnoitring expeditions, by means of which the thinker explores not only the main road but the footpaths which lead off from it. True to his method, he considers and observes, then thinks over the data of his observations, and arrives at a conclusion which he refuses to follow up be-

fore testing it. Nowadays we should think this procedure somewhat slow for solving the problem of religion. But if we put ourselves in Diderot's country, in the state of thinking of his age, we are bound to recognise that his development was remarkably quick.

Be that as it may, in the Thoughts of a Philosopher Diderot was no longer either Christian or theist. He was not yet an atheist. He would not so much as believe in the existence of atheists, until experience forced him to take notice of them and even to respect some of them.

"A man was once asked if genuine atheists existed. Do you believe, he answered, that genuine Christians exist?"(par.16)

In par. 22, Diderot divides atheists into three classes :

"There are those who tell you explicitly that there is no God, and who believe it : these are the true atheists ; there are a considerable number who do not know what to think and who are willing to settle the question by tossing up: these are the atheistic sceptics; there are many more who wish that there may be no God, make a pretence of being sure of it, and live as if there were none : these are the swaggerers."

Diderot detested the swaggerers, pitied the true atheists, and prayed for the sceptics who were without light.

He himself was no sceptic. Those who make out that he was mistaken : the problem is more complicated than they think. For what is a sceptic?

"He is a philosopher who has doubted all that he believes, and believes all that he has proved true by the fair use of his reason and his senses. Would you have a more explicit definition? Make an honest man of a Pyrrhonian, and you have a sceptic." (par.30)

The context implies that primary doubt must be distinguished from final doubt. The sceptic is one who does not begin with doubt, but ends with it. Now, Diderot was never that kind. The sceptic has weighed all the

evidences, overlooked nothing, and in the end suspends his judgment. Diderot, however, comes down on one side. It does not matter that his verdict may be wrong, and that he will substitute another for it in due course. He has come to a conclusion. Doubt at the starting point is not scepticism, but the first step to the truth.

Where was truth for Diderot in 1746? Possibly he might have found it in atheism, but if he did, what basis had morality? The leaven of deism which Shaftesbury had implanted was still working in him. The deist admits the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and all that these propositions imply; the sceptic limits himself and will not solve these problems; as for the atheist, he meets them with a conclusion of non-acceptance. The greatest moral yearnings are certainly to be found with the deist. The sceptic has none at all, and in the atheist, they do not count for much. One prop to his honesty is lacking. But since the God of superstition is an imaginary God, since atheism cannot be refuted by the subtleties of scholastic philosophy with its proofs that God exists, its only dangerous rival is deism.

Diderot is split in two, so to speak. A war between atheism and deism was being waged within him. The arguments from cosmology and the order of nature could be brought forward on behalf of the former; arguments from the moral order alone fought for the latter. Diderot forgot that these moral arguments were of little avail to prove anything. He did not triumph. He announced his victory only after he had called in physico-cosmological proofs.

"Does not a maggot's eye bear the mark of divinity as clearly as great Newton's masterpieces bear the mark of the power of thought? Is not the intelligence of the primary being proved to me in the nature of his works, better than writings of a philosopher prove his power of thought? Think, then, that when I would crush you with the weight of the universe I confront you with a

butterfly's wing, a maggot's eye.... For reasons such as this, and others of like simplicity, I admit the existence of God; not for those dry and metaphysical tissues of ideas which have less power to reveal the truth than to give it the semblance of falsehood" (par. 20).

We will not linger to refute Diderot the deist; he very soon took this task upon himself. The prestige of Newton, who believed in God, declined in the eyes of Diderot - Saunderson when the blind recovered his sight. The teleological proof of God's existence, which originated with Leibniz, was abandoned when Diderot grew interested in chemistry, physiology and mechanics.

Meanwhile, he confirmed his deist faith by an original religious plebiscite, which he himself referred to elsewhere as "a mode of reasoning perhaps more remarkable than reliable." He went to work in the same way as Cicero, when he wished to prove that the Romans were the most warlike people.

"Chinese, what would be the best religion, if not your own? The religion of nature. Mussulmans, what faith would you embrace if you forswore Mahomet? Natural religion. Christians, what is the true religion, if Christianity is not? That of the Jews. But, ye Jews, what is the true religion, if Judaism is false? The religion of nature. Now, those... who are given the second place by unanimous agreement, and who do not yield the first place to any one person, undoubtedly deserve the first"(par.62)

4. On the Road to Atheism

The work with which Diderot immediately followed up the *Thoughts of a philosopher* was *The Sceptic's Walk, or The Pathways* (1747).

The action takes place in a huge garden. Along one of its walks, the Pine Pathway, devout people are wandering, clothed in white, with eyes blindfolded. Though they cannot see, they are forbidden to soil their clothes (in other words, to sin), and soap is sold to them if they are unfortunate enough to do so (i.e. they are given absolution). It should be mentioned that there are disagreements about the soap.... In the Cehstnut Pathwat, the most various philosophers are gathered together. When the allegory is deciphered it became clear that these philosophers are Pyrrhonians, atheists, deists, followers of Spinoza and of Berkely (these last Diderot dubs the egotists). Finally the third walk, the Pathway of Flowers, is filled with care-free folk, worldlings whose morals are not over-strict.

Naigeon has remarked that the only interesting pathway is the philosophers'. In the course of the discussions on philosophy and theology, the problem which was always tormenting Diderot is raised if not solved : Is there a God? If there is, how should we think of him? And why can we not do without him?

In the "Prefatory Discourse" one of the speakers observes that after considering all the world around him he can see two things only which deserve attention :

"Make me keep silence on government and religion, and I have no more to say."

In the Sceptic's Walk, then, the question of religion is discussed everything else is approached from this angle. It is as an aspect of this problem that Diderot defines the tendencies of philosophy. Now that we have the key to the allegory, let us examine some of them.

The Pyrrhonians and sceptics neither know nor wish to know anything. What they see may be such-and-such, but it might equally well not have been. With these folk the problem can never be solved. Diderot's definition of Spinozism is plainly inadequate. He makes Substance a distinct being, and presents the philosophy in a vulgarised form. If God is nature itself, then the Spinozists are taking a walk on their God's back. "Here, they play with reason and with various equivocal phrases."

In 1747 he did not yet know how strongly he would feel the influence of the philosopher of whom he makes fun. As for Berkeley's subjective idealism, he simply laughed at it; and as was to be expected, he devoted special attention to the deists and the atheists.

The deists are in no doubt of the existence of the other world. They are convinced that divine wisdom "has left them nowhere without light, and that reason is a gift received from him." and this gift will serve to guide their actions. According to them God must be respected : he is never harsh to excess, and the punishments he meted out are just. In the Sceptic's Walk, Diderot is still exposing the inadequacy of atheism as a conception of the universe and of human life. He is still terrified by the absence of all checks, which must mean that evil deeds and crimes are left unpunished. If atheists do not fear the Last Judgment, and since they deny it, they cannot fear it, the only thing which will replace its restraining power is the force of actual punishment by the civil authorities. It seems that Diderot has forgotten what he wrote in the notes to his translation of Shaftesbury, about virtuous atheists and the relativity of evil.

All the same, in the work which we are analysing, Diderot comes nearer to atheism, or to put it more accurately, moves further from theism. He gives no place in the Chestnut Pathway to Christians, thus refusing to grant them even the name of philosophers, which in his eyes was a title of honour. When a believer strays into it, Diderot is quick to show his ignorance and poverty of thought, by setting up an atheist against him. In the *Thoughts of a Philosopher*, he said that a theist was not a formidable antagonist for an atheist. For anyone who accepts a supernatural revelation is looking for God with his eyes blindfolded. Even if God crosses his path, how can he recognise him in the darkness? It is true that the holy man always takes refuge in the answer that he, sacrificing only a few pleasures in this life, gains much in the life everlasting, while the atheist in his determination to take no risks, risks losing all.

In the atheist's hands the cosmological argument is easily turned against God.

"If matter is everlasting, if it is ordered by motion, and if motion originally arranged it in the shapes in which, as we see, it still preserves it, where is the need for your prince?....So long as our organs keep their balance, we think; when that balance is altered, we rave. What becomes of the soul when that balance is destroyed?"

Diderot pays serious attention to these objections from the atheist, and invariably answers them with arguments on the teleological plane.

Finally, Diderot launches against the atheist his most dangerous antagonist, the deist. The latter begins to speak of the order of the universe, the stars, and the hand that has lit them. This is very fine, no doubt, but is it accurate? Is there no confusion and disorder? Diderot lends an attentive ear to the atheist's suggestions :

"Before us we have an unknown machine, what we have seen of its operations proves the regularity of its movements according to some of us,

and its lack of co-ordination, in the opinion of others. Ignorant people, who have not investigated more than a single wheel, of which they only understand a few cogs, use the indentations of these as a basis for their surmises about a hundred thousand other wheels, of whose working and contacts they know nothing at all. To give a workmanlike finish, they put the maker's name upon the goods."

Yet this machine does not supply us with a single piece of evidence about its maker. From a single point in space, we cannot form conclusions about infinite space. Here, thrown down anyhow, pell-mell, in a huge garden, are some debris of stones, earth and rubble. In this heap a maggot and an ant are comfortably settled.

"What would you think of these insects if, reasoning as you do, they went into ecstasies over the wisdom of the gardener who had made all these arrangements for their benefit?"

While he rejects Spinoza's system without even giving it a second thought, Diderot borrows weapons from it to defend determinism against the philosophy which takes man for its centre.

Nevertheless, Diderot the deist does not surrender; he sets up purpose against causation; instead of admitting necessity, he appeals from it to liberty. He tries to liken the determinism of the atheist to a chance which falls out according to rules. Since the cause is unknown, it is chance. The microscope which reveals the internal organs of silkworm contributes to proof of God's existence.

"How greatly his cause gains from the anatomy of the human body, and the understanding of other natural phenomena!"

It gains nothing, retorts the atheist without the flicker of an eyelid, except that there is organisation in matter. This retort remains substantially unanswered, and Diderot, quickly bringing the discussion to an end, expresses the general opinion of philosophers : the atheist may perhaps be right, but the deist has probability on his side.

In logic, then, the atheist is victorious ; but in practice his philosophy is turned to his own confusion, and Diderot invents an outcome which is decidedly ingenuous and artificial. On their return the philosophers find the atheist's house burgled, his wife carried off, and his children strangled. It is supposed that this disaster is the work of a blind holy man, whom the atheist has taught to scorn the voice of conscience and the law of society whenever he is in a position to be emancipated from them with impunity. In acting as he did, the blind man had been logically following his teaching, and the atheist could neither complain nor lay the blame on anyone; this was to be his punishment. Diderot is forced to make use of such a device because he does not yet know how to find a formula for basing the moral order on an atheist and materialist foundation. Here, even more than in the *Thoughts*, Diderot acknowledges the force of the theoretical argument for materialism and atheism. He never allows the least of the deist's propositions to go by without objection. He denies the argument from purpose. Yet he allows the existence of God "on moral grounds."

In the *Sceptic's Walk*, then, the leftward orientation is even more clearly marked. But scepticism is lacking, in the sense which Diderot gives to the word, and which it must keep. Even if we hold to the form and title of this allegoric narrative, we cannot shut our eyes to its content. In the body of it, Diderot depicts sceptics (Diphile and Nerestor) and Pyrrhonian sceptics (Zenocles and Damis). But he joins forces with neither; he even makes fun of the latter quite as vigorously as he makes fun of the atheist. His personal sympathy goes out to Philoxene, the deist. The general conclusion of the *Walk* is like that of the *Thoughts* ; he does not withhold judgment, as is proper for a sceptic. He acknowledges deism as a force making for morality - a position which we, on our part, do not believe to be legitimate or nearly secure enough. That is why it is impossible to accept Hattner's opinion, when he judges that in the *Walk* Diderot "leaps into the abyss of absolute doubt."

At this point we must describe the conclusion which this literary historian puts into Diderot's mouth.

"The real, true and effective beginning lies in pleasure and self-love."

If the Pathway of Flowers follows the Chestnut Pathway, that only symbolises that the ideas of those who haunt it are more perfect. If scepticism is to be seen in the *Walk*, it will be seen equally in his later development. For at each stage, before he leaves it behind, Diderot casts doubt on the worth of the stage before. But this doubt is not scepticism; it is the very spirit of criticism.

Generally speaking, Diderot's development as seen by the anti-materialist historians often follows a very unexpected and original line. Thus, Rosenkrantz considers that the scattered thoughts published under the title *On the Adequacy of Natural Religion*, written in 1747, immediately after the *Walk*, carry on the "theist" conclusions of the latter work. It must be pointed out that the majority of historians fail to draw a distinction between the conceptions of deism and of theism, although in the eighteenth century, the difference was clear enough. Thus Assezat rightly points out that these fragments really follow up the last of the *Thoughts of a Philosopher*, which is repeated very nearly word for word in fragment 9. Further, he considers that they were written between 1747 and 1749, in other words, after the *Sceptic's Work*. The editor of Diderot's *Complete Works* is bound to accept a statement of this kind; that is to say, in fact, to endorse the words of Rosenkrantz. Diderot's development must go through the following stages; Christianity, deism, scepticism, natural religion. If theism is not confused with deism, there is no dividing line between the latter and natural religion; for instance, in paragraph 26, the disciple of natural religion is quite simply referred to as a "deist". If, on the other hand, these two conceptions are confused, the return to natural

religion after a period of absolute doubt in religious matters seems altogether ridiculous.

In spite of the opinions of Rosenkrantz and Assezat, these writings do not represent a forward step in Diderot's development. In them, as in the *Thoughts of a Philosopher*, Diderot is still a deist. From our point of view, the question is unimportant. His attack is directed solely against theism and revealed religion. He does not even come near the arguments about atheism and systems of philosophy which he makes use of in the *Sceptic's Walk*. The work is, moreover, a badly forged chain of purely intellectual syllogisms. Diderot turns neither to experience nor to the natural sciences. We need not trouble ourselves with a detailed examination of these fragments : while they are not a backward step, they do not contain any advance on what he has already said.

5. 'The Letter on the Blind', a Programme of Materialist Philosophy

The Letter on the Blind, for the Use of Those Who See, marks the next step in the development of Diderot's philosophy. It gives evidence of a definite step forward. For this reason, when he makes any subsequent reference to God, an "eternal" supreme being, we must hold that he has merely grown used to expressing his thought in traditional ways. Spinoza, in the same way, puts new meaning into old ideas.

Diderot had very considerably widened his range of studies. The problems of knowledge, of cosmogony and of the philosophy of nature are included in his field of thought. Following our plan of devoting an essay to each aspect of his work, we will postpone to later chapters much of the material supplied by this Letter. In 1749 Diderot was, on the whole, a mature thinker who had chosen his side on many problems; it only remained for him to develop thoughts of which the seeds were already in his mind.

Diderot, as is well known, was interested in the first impressions of the blind after the operation which gave them sight. His lack of success with the patient of Reaumur compelled him to trust to his own observations of a blind vine-dresser. He also received information about a blind professor at Cambridge University, the mathematician Saunderson, who had recently died. Towards the end of his life he returned to the same kind of interest, as the Supplement to the Preceding Letter shows. In the course of his researches, which were amateurish no doubt, he discovered a great many true facts, and sketched some outlines which modern science pre-

serves. He also made some mistakes. These mistakes were very excusable in the middle of the eighteenth century, but are less so in those who have committed them since.

Thus, for instance, he imagined that the blind, who live in night, have some way of visualising darkness. Years afterwards this same view was to be taken up, with great artistry, by V.G. Korolenko in his *Blind Musician*. It is not true, however, that the colour black is the absence of visual sensation; it does not appear through the lack of light, but on the contrary, presupposes light. Blackness is relative to whiteness, brightness to darkness. In order to call an object "dark" or "bright", a man must have vision.

"It is an entirely false assumption that a blind man sees in darkness; were it true, the blind man would have sight. As Helmholtz expresses it, He sees objects exactly as we ourselves see them behind our backs; in other words, he does not see them at all."

Diderot speaks regretfully of the difficulty of conversing with the blind on abstract philosophical subjects, notwithstanding their aptitude for abstract thinking. Today we are in a better position, thanks to scientific research and the evidence offered by blind men who have received the philosophic training which Diderot so much desired for them. This evidence suffices to prove that expressions of "brightness" and "darkness" among blind people are relative and conventional. A.M. Chterbina, of the chair of Philosophy in the University of Moscow, who lost his sight at the age of three and has retained no visual impressions, informs us :

"I only know of the existence of light and darkness through other people's awareness of them; I am not directly conscious of them..... I figure them to myself partly by images of touch and sound, by images of smell and even by emotional images... Generally speaking these representations are not marked by permanence or definiteness ; I have never found them particularly interesting."

Relying on observations made to him personally by Mdemoiselle de Salignac, a blind woman whom he knew, Diderot stated that the blind did not find light attractive, and had no special desire to regain their sight.

"But for the force of curiosity, I should be quite as anxious for long arms; it seems to me that my hands would teach me more about what goes on in the moon than your eyes or your telescopes."

Diderot puts these words into the mouth of the blind man of Puiseaux. The final words of Chterbina, quoted above, confirm this indifference. Diderot draws a whole series of conclusions about the optimism of the blind, who are content with their condition, about their sense of touch, their primary evidence of the reality of external objects, and so forth, which agree with the data given by Chterbina from subjective observation.

Diderot, moreover, quite correctly calls attention to the existence of a "sixth sense" among the blind (Fernsinn, sense of obstacles, facial perception) and establishes its exact relationship with the skin of the face, considered as an independent sense-organ. One of the most recent specialists on the subject gives Diderot credit for this. Though he tried no experiments, he remarked in passing that the blind are aware of objects at a distance, by the "action of the air" on their faces. A. Kordie, after a long series of experiments, finds that the "sixth sense" of the blind, their sense of obstacles, is based on impressions of temperature experienced by the face, and especially on sensations of heat radiated by objects in front of them. Thus he explodes the old theory by which this sense was held to be either a survival of sight, or an effect of sound impressions (Tronschel) or of mixed sound and touch impressions (Heller).

In the same way, it is only recently that we have arrived at a scientific understanding of the language common to the blind and to those who have sight, in the realm of geometry; but Diderot showed us the basis for this understanding in 1749. He was surprised to find the blind Saunderson

lecturing on optics, discoursing on the nature of colour and light, explaining the theory of vision, the phenomenon of the rainbow, etc. Saunderson also wrote a treatise on Algebra; again, it was he who divided the cube into six pyramids, with a common apex and a face of the cube for the base of each. This was the problem which Diderot set to Mlle de Salignac.

"Mademoiselle, imagine a cube. - I see it. - Imagine a point at the centre of this cube. ... Yes. - Draw lines at right angles from this point; you will now have divided the cube. Into six equal pyramids, she added of her own accord, each with the same faces, the base of the cube and half of its height. Quite right; but where do you see that? - In my head, as you do."

It is clear that the phenomena of light and colour are unknown to the blind, but the rays of light reach them in the slenderest threads, and impress their sense of touch.

Chterbina expressed himself in almost the same terms, though he knew nothing of Diderot's work.

"When I was studying physics at the Grammar School I was passionately interested in optics. At the time I knew nothing at all about Saunderson. I pictured rays of light to myself entirely in the form of geometrical lines. I had no images of light or colour and was very little interested in these images in themselves, but, during recreation, I used to be quite successful in explaining spectral analysis, chromatic phenomena, etc., to my schoolfellows who could see."

The blind man's geometry is the same as that of the man who sees. In abstract thinking, they both set aside the qualitative differences in their sensations, to discover their common basis. A straight line drawn on the skin appears to one in the form of a visual sensation, and to the other as a sensation of touch. That is all the difference.

"Notwithstanding the qualitative differences between sensations of light and of touch (a material distinction, so to speak) we must recognise that they

are qualitatively related (a formal relationship, of order, arrangement and connections), and that this quantitative relationship explains the analogy between the facial perceptions of the blind and of those who see."

Thus Diderot, in an aside in his Letter, makes a casual note of a fact which was new to his age, and which has since then come to light as a great gain in scientific understanding. Similar intuitions are common in the Letter. They are not linked with the guiding idea of the work, but they bear witness to the author's penetrating insight into the nature of man.

In his real and imaginary conversations with the blind man of Puiseaux, and in the story of the last moments of Saunderson, Diderot was able to express his views on the relativity of moral and metaphysical ideas. The blind do not understand how it is that those who can see assign so much importance to visual perception. Men who can see feel pity for a horse in pain, and yet will crush the harmless ant without a scruple. Why, moreover, may certain parts of the body be uncovered and not other parts, and why do we prefer some of these parts to others?

"Ah, madame! how different is the blind man's morality from our own! And the morality of the deaf differs again from that of the blind, and a being with one sense more than we have would find our own morality imperfect!"

For the blind, there is no such thing as the proof of God's existence from the nature and purpose of things. For them the sun is less important than the fire in the chimney corner, which can be poked up or banked down at will. Here Diderot is certainly thinking of a blind man "in the state of nature" as the contemporary phrase went, not of the blind man who lives among people with eyesight, and is affected by their influence and indirectly by their standards. He makes no allowance for the part played by environment. In short, he considers man according to nature; but his starting point, the universal sensualism which has materialism for its basis, is undeniably the sound one.

Diderot made the dying Saunderson speak in the same vein as the atheist in the Sceptic's Walk. He will admit nothing that he cannot feel. If he is asked to believe in God, he must needs manage to touch him first. By this Diderot means to say that men will believe in God when they have visible, palpable, concrete evidence. Is it enough to bring proofs from the beauty of nature or the perfection of living things? No. How can you speak of perfection when ugliness and blindness are paraded before you?

"If nature presents us with a knot which is hard to untie, let us leave it as it is; let us not cut it by the hand of a being who will in his turn become a new knot for us, even more impossible to untie than the other."

According to the Indian, the world is upheld by an elephant and the elephant by a tortoise. But what supports the tortoise? One can only be sorry for the poor Indian. If you need a boundary to bring you to a stop, if the first link is required, there are matter and motion to satisfy you; with these data to start from, everything else can be deduced. But Newton believed in God. Yes, Newton believed in God on his word, but Saunderson refuses to believe on Newton's word. This passage is certainly the liveliest in the Letter...

But this is a sad conclusion for a deist, and Diderot wants to tone it down. After the old and dying Saunderson has spoken like a materialist and an atheist, he makes him say these words :

"O God of Clarke and Newton, take pity on me!"

How can he finally give up God, how can he leave God's place empty? But Diderot is not sincere in making Saunderson pray thus. Damiron rightly says : "Diderot wants to believe, but he believes no more." The last word is spoken, there is no more to say : Diderot has already asserted materialism and atheism.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find Voltaire, to whom Diderot sent a copy of the Letter, touched to the quick by this way of denying God. He wrote to Diderot;

"It is impertinence to claim to divine what he is, and why he has made all that exists, but to deny that he is at all seems to me sheer rashness."

Diderot's reply must be studied with caution. An author who is still young is writing, no doubt for the first time, to the patriarch of Ferney, for whom he has the utmost respect, and whose opinion is of importance to him. Accordingly, he puts the responsibility on Saunderson, blaming his blindness. Two years later, however, in the Encyclopaedia, he declared that Saunderson's words were not the mathematician's own. This man's opinions, wrote Diderot to Voltaire, are neither mine nor yours ; but were we deprived of sight, they might be ours. All through the night I doubt the existence of God; only after the sun has risen am I sure of it again. Saunderson, moreover, reasons correctly. If none but material beings existed there could have been no spiritual beings, for they must either give birth to themselves or be produced out of matter. If none but spiritual beings existed, there could have been no material beings; for spirit cannot act on matter. But material beings do exist, is Diderot's unspoken thought. As a result :

"If there had never been any but material beings, there could never have been spiritual beings; for spiritual beings would derive their existence, or would have derived it, from material beings; they would be modes, or at least results, of matter. But if there had never been any but spiritual beings you see that there would never have been material beings.... together they make up the universe, and.... the universe is God. How strongly this argument is reinforced by the opinion which you share with Locke, that thought may well be a modification of matter."

This vital passage proves not only that Diderot at the time had read Spinoza's works with attention, but that he had become a Spinozist himself - a "neo-Spinozist" as he called it later. Thought and extension are attributes of a single substance : this substance is God. God, or Nature,

or Matter. The addition of these two words or Matter shows the superiority of the Spinozist conception. Thought may be a modification of matter, but matter cannot be a modification of thought. Diderot is a materialist, and the term "God", which still reappears in his works, is deprived of its ordinary meaning. It matters little that after this Diderot pays his respects to Voltaire.

"I am not of their (the atheists') opinion. I believed in God, although I get on well with atheists."

We quite understand that Diderot was deceiving himself. that he did not identify an atheist with a criminal, and that in his eyes an atheist could be an upright man.

"I realise that the charm of order held them captive in spite of their tenets; that they were enthusiasts for beauty and goodness, and that when they were men of taste they could neither endure a bad book... nor commit an evil deed. That is all that concerns me about them....'The world', said Montaigne, 'is a tennis-ball which he (God) has left to the philosophers to throw about'. and I say much the same about God himself."

6. The Problem of the Prayer Following 'Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature'

Caro considers that the Sequel to the Apology of : 'Abbe de Prades shows moderate unbelief, and at the same time marks the end of Diderot's deism. We have shown that his deism was dead earlier than that. As for the unbelief, it is impossible to understand how degree can be admitted in unbelief applied to a single object, to God as a fact.

The Apology cannot be held to be a landmark in Diderot's intellectual development. As a characteristic work defining a complete stage of that development it is worth no more than the *Improper Gems*. Diderot the "pantophile" published the book neither anonymously nor under a pseudonym; but in the form of a defence of himself by the Abbe de Prades, who had been condemned and had fled from France. The Abbe was a theist who had published two books which stirred up a good deal of talk; they were held to be heretical by the faculty of theology and the entire clergy. Prades defended himself in two hearings by a written "apology" in two parts. Diderot took upon himself to write a third, which was published separately. The Abbe was a friend whom he used to help in his work, and on whom he may have had a certain influence. The clergy were indignant with the sensationalism displayed in his writings, with his theory of society, and his unorthodox reflections on the miracles and the prophecies, so Diderot took him, so to speak, under his wing. But while he wrote in the name of a cleric who was endeavouring to reply to a charge of heresy, he could not and would not pass the limits enjoined on him. He did it so skilfully that not suspected in the author of this "third part" of the Apology

the author of the *Thoughts of a Philosopher* or the *Letter on the Blind*.

After pointing out that the crusade against Prades was also a crusade against the *Encyclopaedia* (of. the *Apology* par. 3), Diderot-Prades owned that his principles were not far removed from some propositions in the *Dictionary* which "he would certainly not undertake to justify". For Diderot was not reluctant to pick up the passages in the Abbe's writings in which he had discoursed upon the prophecies and the miracles. On the contrary, he was delighted to discuss sensationalism, natural society and the social contract. The little work is not remarkable except as evidence of his skill in controversy; it is worth while to see the artistry with which he shatters the charge of heresy and demonstrates that of all men the Abbe de Prades is the one authentic Christian. These remarks will explain why we pass quickly over this piece of controversial writing.

On the other hand, it is necessary to dwell on the *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature*. Suddenly, in 1754 and recurring several times, we meet in Diderot's writings an "eternal" God, allusions to the wondering admiration which the prophet felt when he looked at the unnumbered stars, and other statements of the same kind. This enables Damiron to find in this book fresh traces of faith in God and in the immortality of the soul. These phrases, however, (they cannot even be called "statements"), are interpolations intended to mislead the censors. One would have to be as blind as Saunderson not to see the atheism in the book.... But by 1754 Diderot had already on his record one book burnt, one imprisonment and the banning of the *Encyclopaedia*. To express himself directly was dangerous not only for his own safety but for that of the whole *Encyclopaedia*. And yet it was essential to give his collaborators and his judges a sort of guide to scientific method. *Thoughts of the Interpretation of Nature* is that guide-book, written for a limited number of the initiated. To distract the attention of the Jesuits, Diderot could cheerfully make use of "the Eternal."

One of Diderot's contemporaries and associates understood this perfectly :-

"The author of the Cacouac's Catechism and the Philosophers' Comedy was far from suspecting that in this work Diderot had a passage in which he quietly undermines the foundations of the proofs derived from the order and arrangement of the universe. He does not make a formal declaration that these proofs are valueless ; in fact, he disguises himself, fearing to be understood by those who have the power to censor him, but not one of the philosophers for whom he writes is deceived, and that is exactly what he wants."

The colossal blindness of the enemies who knew nothing about the Encyclopaedia is astonishing even today. After spending a whole page in making clear his transformity hypothesis, and the superiority of the theory which explains the origin of species by natural selection, Diderot adds with touching simplicity.

"Religion saves us from many labours and errors. Had it given us no light on the beginning of the world and on the universal system of things, we might have been tempted to hold many different theories about the mystery of nature."

Thus the paragraph contains a theory of the origin of species, but it leads off with a few lines in which Diderot expresses his satisfaction at knowing that faith has shown us that.

".....living things issued from the hands of the creator just as we behold them."

It is worth a bet that Naigeon was referring to this very passage. Diderot's method recalls that of Descartes, when he disarmed and conquered his enemies at one stroke.

"I do not doubt for a moment that the world was created from the beginning in its present perfection, inasmuch as the sun, the earth, the moon, the stars were on the surface, and that the earth not only contained in itself the

seeds of plants, but was even partly covered by plants; that Adam and Eve were created not children but man and woman of full age. The Christian religion bids us believe such things, religion of nature gives us no absolute assurance of their truth..... All the same, we shall be better able to understand the general nature of things in the world, if we can imagine some plain and simple principles, which will show us clearly how the stars, the earth, and the whole visible world might have been produced from a few seeds..."

And the whole Cartesian theory of the universe follows this profession of faith. Thus, the real problem of the Thoughts should not be sought in such passages, deliberately introduced into a book printed for publication; it should be sought in the famous Prayer.

There is not the slightest doubt that every believer regards this "prayer" as a blasphemy and a plain avowal of atheism. It reminds on of the Swiss gentleman's prayer which Voltaire gives in an anecdote : "O God, if there is a God, save my soul, if I have a soul".

Naigeon says that Diderot sent the Thoughts to press along with the "Prayer". Three copies had been completed and published when he changed his mind and cut it out of all the others.

Naigeon kept a single extract from it : the invocation not to God but to Man. Feeling that this extract expressed Diderot's real views, he introduced it into the book which Diderot dedicated to Seneca. But he certainly would not have thought so had he remembered the whole text. Some extracts will enable us to form an opinion of it :

"I ask nothing in this world ; for if thou art not, the order of things is necessary in itself ; or if thou art, it is necessary by thy decree.

I hope that thou will reward me in another world, if there be one, though in this world all that I have done I have done for myself.

If I am good, I am good without effort; if I turn from evil, I do not think of thee.

I could not prevent myself from loving truth and virtue, and hating falsehood and vice ; not if I knew that thou dost not exist, or if I believed that thou dost exist and would be offended thereat.

Behold me as I am, a gragment of eternal and inevitable matter, inevitably ordered; or, it may be, a creation of thy hand."

On a careful study of the contents of the "Prayer", and taking into account the guiding idea of the Thoughts and the analysis already given of Diderot's works, it will be seen that this little piece was to play the part of a lightning-conductor in the original plan of the work. Diderot wanted to append it to the Thoughts so as to tone down the impression he made on his powerful enemies and turn aside their anger. But he found it altogether too explicit and quite heretical enough in itself, and thought it better suppressed.

This essay might be concluded here : its subject is exhausted. Diderot's other writings on this theme. The Catechising of a Proselyte Who Answers for Himself, the dialogue between Oron the worthy Tahitian and the European chaplain in the Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage, bring us nothing fresh, except a few witty reflections aimed at the "great artificer". In the Catechising, we find maxims of the uselessness of religion and the universal law of cause and effect; in the Supplement the Tahitian valiantly and soundly denounces the idea of a creator.

7. The Practical Conclusions of Atheism

It remains to bring out the practical consequences of this conclusion : after he had denied the existence of God, emphasized the uselessness, even the danger of conceiving a supreme being, Diderot declared the necessity of making war on religious ideas. But how was this war to be waged? Should he "go to the people", set up as a tribune in some club or public meeting-place? At that time, such a line of action was still impossible. Besides, he himself was temperamentally no militant, no technical expert of the revolution. Naigeon said that Diderot had not a passion for discussing God continuously. He never opened a conversation on the subject; it was perfectly clear to him, and he did not seek to spread his atheism. If he chose disciples, they were people for whom the denial of God was a question already settled, after a preliminary study of the problem of the natural sciences as a whole.

Naigeon was drawn on by his controversy with the Abbe Vauxcelles, and was not altogether right. It is true that among his own friends, in the circles of the salons, Diderot never tried to make proselytes for atheism at all costs. It is even less likely that he set out to convert Morellet and Marmontel. The latter even note that in d'Holbach's society, discussions on God were never raised in his presence. Diderot might be expected to give a justification of the war against religion, but not to extend the war directly by word of mouth. But if written propaganda was meant, what else was his whole literary activity after 1750? Diderot realised that to take his stand on the ground of purely theological argument - which was the mistake he made in his earliest writings - led nowhere very much. The

dispute had to be brought down to the realm of natural science, of its laws, and of the science of man and society. Religious metaphysics had to be replaced by a materialist conception of society and a "philosophy of Nature."

Thus arose the question - Religion or philosophy? there was no halfway house.

"Sire", said Diderot, speaking in imagination to Louis XVI, *"if you want priests you do not want philosophers, and if you want philosophers you do not want priests; for the former by their vocation are the friends of reason and the pioneers of science, while the latter are the enemies of reason and the abettors of ignorance; if the former do good, the latter do harm."*

Between them there was a perpetual struggle; and though, as we know, the priests had ruined several philosophers while the philosophers had not ruined a single priest, yet the philosophers were a danger to the sons of the Church. Most dangerous of all was the man who drew the King's attention to the huge sums which the State was spending on these proud and useless sluggards; who reminded him that his subjects paid out 150,000 crowns a day to 150,000 men to deafen them with their bells; who showed that for a hundred days of every year these 150,000 priests laid down the rules of conduct for eighteen million human beings - in the name of God, as they said; who finally emphasized that the inventors of religious festivals flung open their church doors to close the doors of shops and offices for one third of the year.

This dangerous philosopher was Diderot. The words just referred to express the whole drama of the Church and society in France: there we can see the party of civil life bringing a charge against the clerical and aristocratic monarchy in the name of the interests of science and of bourgeois society.

Saint - Beuve, Berceaux, Rosenkrantz, historians who study Diderot's evolution and make an effort to draw a veil over his atheism, have

It is not easy to change the religious beliefs of a nation. "Generally speaking, we do not know how a prejudice come into being among a people, and still less how it goes out." This modest admission is certainly more prudent and more profound than the positive assertions with which d'Holbach maintained that the whole of religion from beginning to end was born of a bestial lie which a group of impostors kept in being. "I know only one way of overthrowing a faith, and that is to bring contempt upon its ministers for their feebleness and vice." An easy but inadequate measure. But for us, separated by two hundred years from Diderot's thoughts and preoccupations, what matters is not that he was unable to foresee the conditions for the final downfall of religious opinions, but that he went through the logical and complex process of "purifying" his understanding, that he divested his own mind of prejudices, and put to future generations the problem of making an end of them.

tried to find some formula of compromise. According to them "Diderot did not deny God but knew nothing of Him, which is not the same thing." (Berceaux). They try to make a contrast between Diderot the atheist philosopher and Diderot the man, longing for faith (Rosenkrantz).

"Diderot, poet and enthusiast by nature, had a leaning towards belief, but he could not accept the arbitrary and tyrannical God whom the priests showed him."

The philosopher himself, however, has refuted them with cutting exactness :

"I do not like this frivolous distinction between the priests' religion and the religion of Jesus Christ."

He adds unmistakably :

"They are identical in fact, and there is not a priest who is not convinced of it."

It is none the less strange to find out that Diderot himself to some extent underestimated the part played by his own works, and their power for the destruction of faith. When he recommended a line of action designed to ruin faith and religious worship, it was a line neither profound nor necessary. He had not grasped the meaning of the historical process, he had not arrived at the explanation of society by the class struggle, therefore he could not point out the moment and the conditions which would make possible the disappearance of religious imagery. When he came down from his ideological structures to their bases in economics, he joined with the men of his time in stopping short at simple measures of legislation. Thus, he would have liked to suppress religious teaching in the schools, close the faculties of theology, and compromise the clergy by denouncing the contradiction between their principles and their practice.



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Dr. Krishna "a brilliant scholar, committed to social advancement, a valiant fighter against imperialism and a steadfast champion of the working class" died in 1948 after languishing in the then British jails.

a publication of **Dr. K.B. KRISHNA**
Birth Centenary Celebrations Committee